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JUNE 1987
SUMMER QUARTER

THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

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Announcing. . . .

Two $1,000 Awards for Short Fiction

THE IOWA SHORT FICTION AWARD

THE JOHN SIMMONS SHORT FICTION AWARD

New Annual Award!

Eligibility

Any writer who has not previously published a volume of prose fiction is eligible to enter the competition for these prizes. Revised manuscripts which have been previously entered may be resubmitted. Writers who have published a volume of poetry are eligible.

Prizes

Two equal $1,000 cash awards will be given. The winning manuscripts will be published by the University of Iowa Press.

We are pleased to announce the establishment of a new prize, the John Simmons Short Fiction Award, which will be presented for the first time in 1988 along with the traditional Iowa Short Fiction Award. John Simmons (1918-1986) was the founding director of the University of Iowa Press and an admirer as well as a writer of fine short fiction.

Manuscript

The manuscript must be a collection of short stories of at least 150 typewritten pages. Stories previously published in periodicals are eligible for inclusion. Xeroxed copies are acceptable. Stamped, self-addressed return packaging must accompany the manuscript. Please do not send cash, checks, or money orders. Reasonable care is taken, but we are not responsible for loss of manuscripts in the mails or for the return of those not accompanied by a stamped envelope. We assume the author retains a copy of the manuscript.

Submission

Manuscripts should be mailed to:

Iowa Short Fiction Awards
Department of English
English-Philosophy Building
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, IA 52242

No application forms are necessary. Entries for the 1988 competition for the Iowa Short Fiction Award and the John Simmons Short Fiction Award should be submitted between August 1, 1987, and September 30, 1987. Announcement of the winners will be made early in 1988.

Potential entrants wishing to review the books by previous winners of the Iowa Short Fiction Award may order them from the University of Iowa Press Order Department, Graphic Services Building, Iowa City, IA 52242.

A REMINDER:

The September 1987 number of *The North American Review* will contain a special 48-page supplement,

The Woman Question

drawn from the pages of the NAR since the middle of the Nineteenth Century. The status of women in America, attitudes toward them, biases for and against them, assessments of their progress toward equality—these and other matters were treated by the country's most astute contemporary writers, both male and female. The Woman Question will draw them into a single sourcebook, concluding with a summary essay by the supplement's editor, Carolyn Hardesty.

ORDERING FOR CLASSROOM USE

Women's Studies directors and teachers of university or senior high school courses in which the status of women is the subject matter may order classroom copies of the September issue of the NAR in quantity at a discount of 20% off the regular $3.00 cover price (with an additional 2% discount for prepayment).

The editors urge that orders be placed in timely fashion; *orders received after August 1, 1987 will be honored only as availability of the issue permits.*
The September NAR will be shipped before October 1, 1987.

The North American Review

University of Northern Iowa Cedar Falls, IA 50614

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This summer fiction issue represents perhaps the last great burst of short stories in the NAR for some time to come, for with the September number we return to an earlier policy of greater balance between the magazine's fiction and nonfiction. We do so after considerable soul-searching. Certainly we care as deeply as ever for the story, and we continue to believe that an insistent morality in fiction is a necessary counter to the persistent immorality of the world. At the same time, we begin to perceive with increased urgency how important it is to make arguments—the direct, unvarnished statements—that awaken morality, and we are therefore rededicating the NAR to its mid-seventies concerns: for the environment, for the ascendancy of reasonableness and common sense, for the image of humankind as the most corrigible of the animal orders. In short, the art of the story and the beauty of the poem are all very well, but there is a planet that needs to be preserved—just in case there really isn't a good universe next door.

Nevertheless, fiction flowers herein. Ten (count 'em) stories dealing with a range of concerns that explain why no general-interest magazine can ever afford entirely to neglect the importance of fiction. Two of the authors—Elizabeth Collison and David Hellerstein—have contributed earlier stories to the NAR; the rest appear here for the first time. And constant readers will note that Eric Zencey has joined the rotation under the *Present Case* heading. After their brief respites, David Hellerstein (a recent father) and Scott Russell Sanders (recently delivered of a new novel) will continue their regular contributions to that column.

Again this year, the NAR was a finalist in the fiction category of the National Magazine Awards, along with *Esquire*, *Mother Jones*, *Chicago*, and *The Georgia Review*. We are proud of the authors who represented us: Gail Galloway Adams ("Inside Dope"), Halina Czarny ("Signs"), and Scott Raab ("Goodbye and Good Luck"). This was the NAR's fifth nomination in eight years; twice we have won the category, and three times have been among the bridesmaids. This year's winner was *Esquire*, to whose fiction staff we extend our warmest congratulations.

Other recent honors: the June 1986 cover of the NAR, by Timothy Earp, received a second place "Addy" award in the Des Moines Ad Professionals' annual competition; Scott Russell Sanders' "The Inheritance of Tools" (March 1986) will be included in *The Best American Essays 1987*, forthcoming from Ticknor & Fields; Gail Galloway Adams' "Inside Dope" (see above) will also be included in the next edition of *Editors' Choice*, forthcoming from Bantam Books, and was the 1986 winner of the short story award given annually by the William A. Blakley Library, University of Dallas.

Among new books of interest to NAR readers are several novels: *Grand Opening*, by Jon Hassler, published by Morrow; *Faithful Rebecca*, by Janice Eidus, published by the Fiction Collective; *Antonia Saw the Oryx First*, by Maria Thomas, from Soho Press, and *The Human Season*, by Sarah Rossiter, from Little, Brown. We also commend to your attention Donald Justice's *The Sunset Maker* (Atheneum), a book of poems and brief prose pieces, and a number of short story collections: George Garrett's *An Evening Performance* (Penguin), Sue Miller's *Inventing the Abbotts* (Harper & Row), Jayne Anne Phillips's *Fast Lanes* (Dutton/Seymour Lawrence). Marvin Bell was poetry editor of this magazine in the 1960s; his *New and Selected Poems* has been published by Atheneum. Other new books of poems by NAR contributors: Ronald Wallace's *People and Dog in the Sun* (Pittsburgh) and Dabney Stuart's *Don't Look Back* (LSU). Benzene Editions (Box 383, New York 10014) has just published *Plans for the Night*, an illustrated short fiction by M. Kasper; a plate from that book appears on page 71.

Response to the announcement that our September number will feature an overview of attitudes toward women, as expressed in the pages of the NAR in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has been strong but tentative. Many university teachers have asked to see one copy of the issue as a way of deciding whether or not it is suitable for classroom use. We applaud this prudent reviewing process, but hasten to note that *after* the September issue is printed, bulk orders will be filled first-come-first-served, and it isn't likely that the issue will be reprinted.

THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

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EDITOR
Robley Wilson, Jr.

POETRY
Peter Cooley

ENVIRONMENT
John Rodman

ART
James Buckels

DESIGN
Steve Pattee

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Margaret Atwood
Roy R. Behrens
David Hellerstein
Leo J. Hertzel
Barry Lopez
Michael Martone
Stephen Minot
Mary Peterson
Barry Sanders
Scott Russell Sanders
Lawrence Sturhahn

BUSINESS MANAGER
Charlotte L. Wilson

EDITORIAL & BUSINESS OFFICES:

University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614

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CREDITS

Cover: *James Buckels*

Drawings: *Timothy Earp, Wayne Hogan, M. Kasper*

FICTION

6 Saying Grace, *by Alex Herne*
11 The Magic Hour, *by Georgann Eubanks*
15 On Voyage, *by Sharon White*
19 Solace, *by Ehud Havazelet*
22 Design, *by Dawn Raffel*
35 Ed, *by Elizabeth Collison*
39 Killer Butterfly, *by David Hellerstein*
44 Daddy Rat, *by Cori Jones*
52 Winter Mines, *by Sharon Dilworth*
57 Wheel-of-Fortune, *by Barbara Grizzuti Harrison*

POETRY

5 Presentation to the King, *by Dean Young*
18 The Anima, *by David Schloss*
26 Codpiece, *by Debra Hines*
38 Katzenjammer, *by Edward Kleinschmidt*

DEPARTMENTS

4 Foreign Correspondence: GINSBERG IN THE MOUNTAIN CITY, *by Liang Shan Quan*
27 Unclassifieds: *by Peter Lushing, Kelly Cherry, Susan Bergman, William Van Wert, Thomas E. Kennedy, Wayne Ude, Trebbe Johnson*
59 The Present Case: ON HUNTING, *by Eric Zencey*
65 Familiar Matters: THOREAU FOR COMMUTERS, *by David Shi*
69 Books & Authors: THOU SHALT KILL, *by Barry Sanders*

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■

Ginsberg in the Mountain City

LIANG SHAN QUAN

At 3 p.m. on November 8, 1985, a plane from Canton landed at the Chongqing (Chungking) Airport. A tall foreigner, with a thick beard, got off. Professor Du Chen Nan and myself, as representatives of the Chongqing Writers' Union, were there to meet him. Immediately we recognized the famous American poet, Allen Ginsberg.

He explained to us that he had been lucky to be invited to China as one of a group of writers. The others had returned to the U.S., but he wanted to visit Chongqing and The Three Gorges. He said unfortunately his time was rather limited—he had only a week and he still had to give lectures on modern American poetry in both Shanghai and Beijing.

The narrow road from the airport to the People's Hotel, near the center of Chongqing, winds through the steep mountains which are typical of Sichuan. In places the view opens to vistas of rice paddies. The ride took nearly forty-five minutes as the road was crowded with the usual trucks, cars, bicycles and pedestrians. There were numerous peasants taking their produce to market in baskets on shoulder poles.

Ginsberg commented as we rode, "Finally, I am getting to see the China I have dreamed of."

When we arrived at the hotel with its huge dome, a replica of The Temple of Heaven in Beijing, Ginsberg wasn't sure he could afford to stay here, but we assured him that he was our guest and that the Writers' Union would pick up the bill. He was obviously relieved and thanked us. It seems that poets all over the world are poor; their purses are never as full as their poems.

From the hotel we set out to find a restaurant. We wanted to show him the new buildings in Chongqing, but that wasn't what he wanted to see. Of course, since he is from New York City, tall buildings wouldn't interest him. At the restaurant, the best in Chongqing, he said he would rather eat in a small shop, so we walked a block to the free market where "fast food" is sold. We made our way through the crowds looking at the booths selling noodles, wontons, fried bread and other snacks. We decided on a booth selling wontons and *tang yuan*, a special dish for Chinese New Year consisting of small dumplings with a sweet filling. We sat on small, wooden benches on the curb and enjoyed the food. We were surprised to see he used chopsticks without any problem.

"Delicious," he told us. He seemed to enjoy watching the people on the crowded street as much as the food.

From there we walked over to see Mr. Wang's smoked ducks. Mr. Wang, a retired worker who has taken advantage of China's new economic policies to produce pressed, smoked ducks which have become famous in Chongqing, greeted us warmly. Mr. Wang presented Ginsberg with a leg, and we took photographs surrounded by curious people.

Afterward, we strolled around the free market looking at the fresh vegetables. He smelled and tasted them, and then recorded the names and prices in his notebook. He said that many of them were unknown in the States.

Presently we stopped to rest at a teahouse. While we were drinking the tea Ginsberg spotted a *hua quo* (hot pot) shop across the street. Mr. Du explained that this was another specialty of Chongqing which is popular in winter. There was a large chafing dish full of hot, spicy oil; you dip meat and vegetables in the oil until it is cooked. Ginsberg wanted to try that, as well, but we were too full.

Since my apartment is close to Jiang Fang Bai (the center of Chongqing, where we were), I asked Ginsberg to drop in, but I warned him that my apartment was on the eighth floor, so if he wanted to visit, he would have to climb a mountain. He replied, "Even if you lived at the top of Mount Omei, I would climb to visit you."

On the way, we passed an eelmonger killing eels by sticking a nail through their heads and then boning them with a sharp knife. We had to step across the dark blood running into the street. Ginsberg said, "If I were an eel, I would feel horrible."

But even though he was upset he added, "While I was staying in Beijing, I stayed in a big hotel and ate in fancy restaurants, but I had no opportunity to see how the Chinese live. I wasn't able to get in touch with people or writers."

Arriving at my apartment building, I saw that this fifty-nine-year-old poet was very healthy and climbed to the top of my building without difficulty. I introduced him to my wife and twin boys.

When he discovered my wife was an actress and opera singer, he said, "Your husband and I are poets, but I'm an actor too. I've been in several movies, and besides, I sing for myself."

My children immediately asked him to sing, so he picked up a guitar and began to extemporize:

Dusk in the mountains.
Birds fly back to the forest.
Go home my child;
Mother is waiting for you.
The boy said,
"No hurry, Mom.
Let me play a little longer;
You can see how wonderful the
dusk is here."

His voice was very sweet and the melody pleased us. He sang some other songs which we recorded.

Later we went down to see the Yangtze River Bridge, where there are the famous sculptures of Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. He looked attentively at the river as it flowed past. I didn't want to interrupt his thoughts, so I was quiet. After a

Moving? Please let us know.

while he murmured to himself, "Yangtze, Yangtze. I heard about you when I was little. Finally, today, I meet you.

"I imagined, at midnight in New York, I could hear the bell of the Han Shan Temple [Cold Mountain temple, which has a famous bell. The Tang Dynasty poet and hermit Han Shan reportedly lived there. Han Shan's poetry has been translated by Gary Snyder and others]. Tonight, here in the Mountain City at the bank of the Yangtze River, I can hear the waves of the Mississippi."

I said, "My friend, you have built a bridge in our hearts on which culture between the U.S. and China can travel."

By now it was nearly 9 p.m., so we took the car to Erling Park, on the bank of the Jialing River, to view the night lights of Chongqing. We climbed to the top of an observation tower where we could see the lights from boats on both the Yangtze and Jialing rivers and on the bridges spanning the rivers. In the sky the stars shone and below in the city and on the mountains the lights twinkled. It was impossible to tell where the mountains ended and the sky began.

Ginsberg said, "I've traveled to many countries and seen the bright light of many cities, but I've seen nothing to compare with this. I will remember these rivers and this city forever. You've given me a lot to write about."

DEAN YOUNG

PRESENTATION TO THE KING

A beach in August, overcast, pelicans
plow great plateaus of air.
A few years ago they were almost gone—
their feathers' insulating oils soaped off
by a polluted rain. They got wet and froze.
Or maybe shells too thin—another chemical story.
But today they collect on the bluff beyond ours,
lower their pontifical chins in benediction
for the starfish losing their limbs in waves below
and maybe even us. Whoever was here before
left a beer can—it's the shiniest thing around.
Sometimes I imagine some of our trash dropped
in the past: an Incan farmer finds a packed
plastic sack and presents it to the king
fearing execution for handling a thing of such
glistening beauty. In his aluminum can head-dress
the king drives the sacred birds wild and finally
away. Pelicans, I say goodbye to you again
here in my mind and what's left of the world,
here where a faint breeze carries
a faint exhaust. Soon our engines will take us
to the speed of light where, as theory says,
two luminous cones extend, one front, one back,
and absolutely nothing comes to our side.

When we arrived back at the People's Hotel it was nearly midnight, so that all the restaurants were closed. We walked along the street until we found a small shop where we ordered peanuts and beer. The shop was full and people crowded around our table. One young man wearing a red sweatshirt introduced himself as a clerk for the Chongqing government. They shook hands and the young man said to Ginsberg, "Reagan was elected again—what do you think of him?"

Ginsberg answered, "He was elected because of the propaganda in the newspapers and on TV. I don't like him."

Other people asked him about life in America. He answered everyone readily and asked about life in China.

When the shop closed we walked back to the hotel. He said he wasn't tired and would like to talk with us a while.

I asked him, "What exactly does 'the Beat Generation' mean?"

"It doesn't matter what name they give us—we turn decay into miracles."

He gave us Chinese translations of a couple of his poems, "A Supermarket in California" and "Howl," and told us that when he recited his poems to music he could get a thousand dollars—more than he received from royalties. "As a representative of the Beat Generation, I am lucky enough to have a large audience."

I commented that poets in China had no such opportunity. Our books are only published in small editions and that is the extent of our income.

He sat on the bed and showed us the posture he used for meditation.

I asked him, "Have you heard of Da Mo, who sat in front of a wall for ten years?"

Ginsberg said, "It wasn't ten—it was nine. I was in India and sat in front of that wall for three months, but that was the best I could do."

Obviously this poet knew Eastern culture very well.

When we said good-bye, he was sitting in the lotus position doing his breathing exercises.

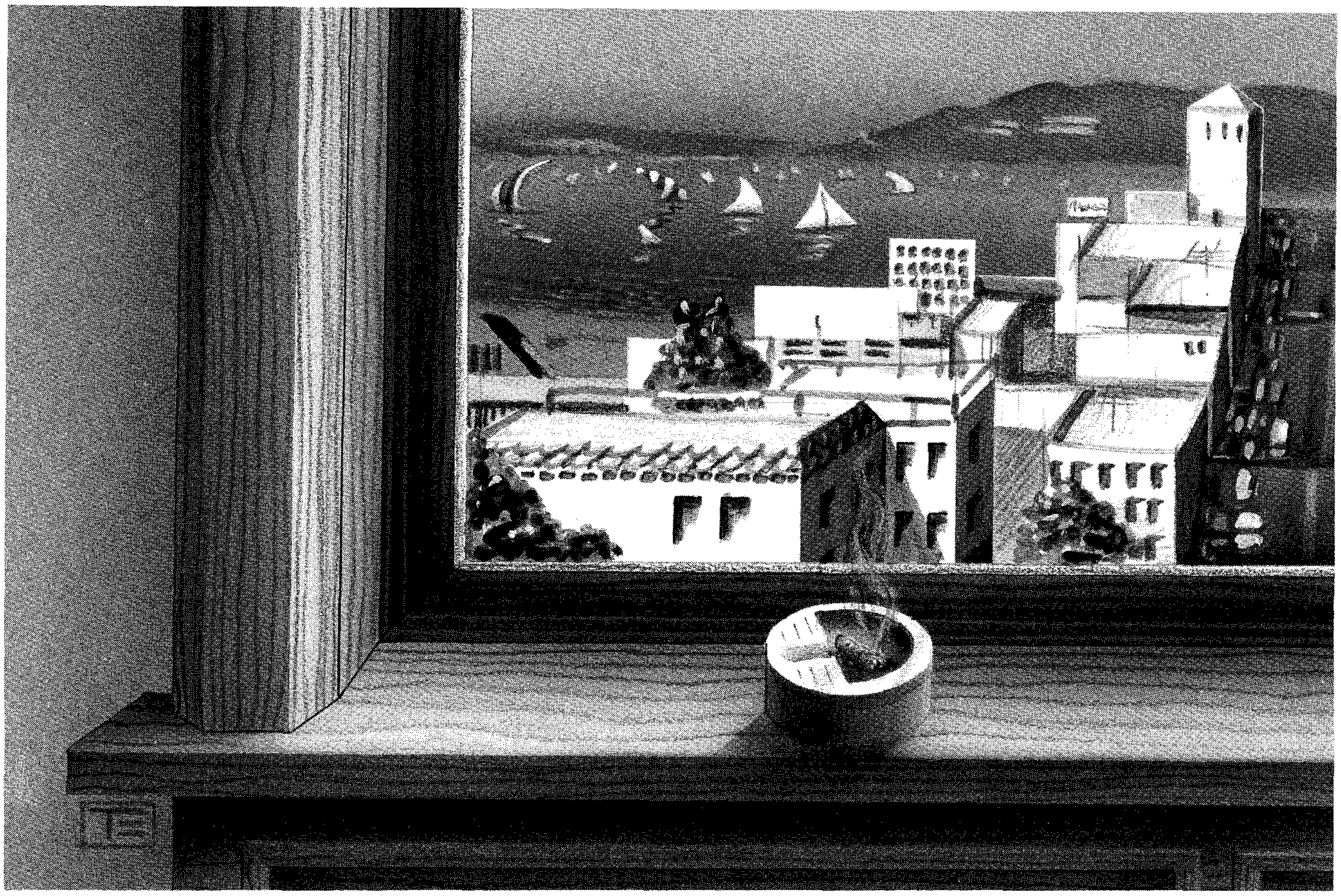
Next morning at six we were afraid he would still be sleeping. Both Mr. Du and myself were exhausted from the previous day, but, to our surprise, he was up writing in his notebook.

After a quick breakfast we accompanied him to the port, Chao Tian Mien, at the confluence of the Yangtze and Jialing Rivers. He embraced us both and thanked us for the warm welcome.

"It is difficult for me to leave you and your beautiful city," he said.

Moved by his sincere words, I replied, "Let the lovely Yangtze travel with you—let the waves of the river, like flowers, accompany you always." □

Translated, from the Chinese, by Rob Hollis Miller and Du Chen Nan



SAYING GRACE

Alex Herne

Clues. I live in San Francisco, in the second-floor flat of a meticulously restored Victorian. There are fitted mini-blinds on the windows, small Oriental rugs on polished tongue-&-groove floors, brushed aluminum frames around pale abstract art-posters, large architectural plants. There is a small nervously good-natured black cat named Twyla Thirp. The flat has two bedrooms and I am advertising, unhappily, for a roommate. Three dear friends have died all in the last six months—all young men—all dying of the same hideous, wasteful, wasting, pointless and horrible disease. I am wary of every cough and fever. Yet I can count myself lucky, in a noxious comparative way; I have my health, my flat, my not inconsiderable income, my pretty things; my tally of loss is low against friends bereft of more (quantitatively and qualitatively), against a city and community whose best and brightest have set out on the long march. That I am "lucky" is no comfort. I am exhausted by grief. I am scared to death.

It is a cold bright Saturday morning in midwinter, the sky scoured clean as a porcelain bathtub by last night's storm. I sit in my dining room, in a low upholstered chair set in front of the French doors onto a tiny deck crowded with pots of anemic geraniums and sad herbs. On a small glass table at my side are a glass carafe of French Roast coffee, an ashtray with two butts, a crystal vase holding a single stem of cymbidium (waxy ochre blossoms highlighted by flecks of maroon) that Twyla knocked off the big plant in the living room. Twyla herself is curled up in my lap, a paw lapped over her eyes and a sliver of tooth showing against the brushed velvet of her chin, the polished black silk of her lip. I am careful not to disturb her as I sip coffee, smoke, and stare out at the sky. She too is bereaved and requires my companionship be gentle, quiet and constant.

It is almost 10:15 and I await both the telephone and the doorbell. At the door will be a man named Eli who believes he fits my stringent requirements for a roommate as specified to the referral agency. Across telephone lines from a condominium complex near the Embarcadero I will hear the voice of either Dan Gregory or his wife Anna, whom I will help, this weekend, to pack up the belongings—the mortal remains—of their brother, my late roommate, who died three weeks ago.

■

This is what it is like to watch someone die of AIDS: it is insupportable.

Yet it goes on, the living, the dying. I stub out my cigarette. A grey impalpable flake of ash rises on my breath, settles onto Twyla's flank. I brush it off. She stirs, moans contentedly. The sky as bright as light. Beyond miles of confused roofscape the choppy blue-grey expanse of the bay and (glimpsed among the eccentric profiles of downtown's highrises) the cut-paper-&-thread web of the Bay Bridge. It is a view I have often wished to paint, in pale lucid watercolor; a vista so desolate as to render any simply human, emotional desolation irrelevant. I would hang this painting on the wall opposite the windows so that when Robbie lowered the blinds (as he did in daylight, happy with the view only when lit by night to a refulgent electric map) he could not escape it.

The doorbell and telephone ring together. Gently dislodging Twyla, I go to answer the phone.

"Tim?" Anna asks, a rising nervous tone tolling on the single syllable of my name.

"Yes, Anna. Can you hold on for a moment? There's someone at the door."

She sighs with relief, "Yes," before I lower the handset to the shelf at the top of the stairs. Looking down, through the visible lower third of the glassed door and wrought iron security gate, I can see the feet of my visitor, shod in pointed polished burgundy cowboy boots, standing on the steps to the street. On my way down I buzz the gate open.

He smiles at me, says, "You must be Tim."

"Yes. Eli? Come in." I lead him upstairs. "Look around," I say. "See what you think. There's coffee in the dining room, through there. Help yourself. I'm on the phone."

"Oh," he says. "Thank you."

"Sorry, Anna," I tell the phone.

"Prospective roommate?" she asks bitterly. "Robbie's replacement?"

"Please, Anna," I say, feeling an abrupt catastrophic faintness. "That was very unkind."

"Oh, Tim, I'm sorry. I'm . . . not at my best." I can imagine her rueful half-smile. I have known Anna for four months now, since September when she abandoned her career in Southern California to join her husband's deathwatch over Robbie. She is a woman of impeccable strength whose inability to do anything substantive for Robbie has hurt her as badly as his dying. "Morning sickness," she says, "on top of everything."

"Anna!" I say, astonished.

"Yes. It's so banal, but yes. I'm pregnant. I'm not working and there's not much chance of finding a full-time position up here, so it seemed a good time. And—" her voice catches—"and Robbie always wanted nieces and nephews."

I sit on the top step. "Robbie's dead," I say quietly.

"I know," she says after a moment, "oh, Tim, *I know*. By the time I was certain, he was too far gone to understand when I told him." She pauses. "But this is for us, Tim, for Dan and me. Not for Robbie. Not only for Robbie."

"I'm glad for you both," I say eventually.

This is what it is like to watch someone you care for die of AIDS: it is like the birth of a toxic dump; it is a poisonous waste.

Now Anna is ready to speak of practicalities. "Shall we come over today, Tim? What's a good time?"

I refrain from reminding her that no time is good for the task we face. "I'll be here all day. Come anytime. Come for lunch. I'll make lunch for you."

"We bought boxes," she adds.

"Good. I don't have any here."

"We'll be there around 11:30. Okay?"

"Fine. Goodbye, Anna."

"Goodbye."

This is what it is like to watch someone dear die of AIDS: it is not a knife-blade so sharp that pain happens only later; it is a shallow infected wound; the infection works deep and the wound will not heal.

My eyes stinging as from a breath of ammonia, I go into the dining room. I light a cigarette and stare out the window. There are sails on the bay: bright nail-paring flecks of color.

It is not, in fact and to be criminally precise, a disease but a syndrome. The acronym is for Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome, a label of frightful antisepsis that replaced an earlier, weightier acronym, GRID, for Gay-Related Immune Deficiency, but which did not defuse the psychic damage of the journalistic tag "the gay plague." The syndrome itself does not kill people. It merely—merely—creates a susceptibility to the aptly-named opportunistic infections. These are diseases which, among the general population, are statistically unlikely; infections that, for all their venom, all their insidious fateful strength, are powerless against the intact, balanced human immune system. AIDS upsets that delicate balance, dissolves the precarious barriers against (among others) Kaposi's Sarcoma (a virulent skin cancer marked by purplish lesions, heretofore diagnosed primarily in elderly men of Mediterranean descent) and Pneumocystis carinii *pneumonia (a disease previously seen almost exclusively among cancer patients and organ transplant recipients—their immunity artificially depressed by chemotherapy or anti-rejection drugs).*

The syndrome seems to be caused by a retrovirus called variously HTLV-III, LAV, and ARV. A reliable test for the presence of the retrovirus has not yet been developed. Prognosis for a vaccine is not good; for a cure, worse. Fatality, five years after diagnosis, stands near 100%—if not from one opportunistic infection then from another or a combination.

"AIDS-victim" and "-patient" are terms that have become semantically unacceptable; the preferred euphemism is "Person with AIDS," abbreviated PWA. In the United States the overwhelming majority of PWAs are homosexual or bisexual males; other groups significantly afflicted are intravenous drug abusers and hemophiliacs. Other—statistically fewer, numbered in tens and twenties rather than hundreds and thousands—victims have included recipients of donations of

infected blood; the female sexual partners of members of the above groups; the newborn children of mothers with AIDS.

The vectors of transmission of the retrovirus seem to be few; infection seems to result only from exchange of bodily fluids—blood or semen, possibly saliva—and it seems likely that the recipients' immune systems must already be compromised to some extent for the full-blown syndrome to take root. The incubation period between infection and onset/diagnosis can, apparently, last up to six years; during this period the bearer is probably capable of spreading the infection. The most efficacious routes of transmission, among gay men, would seem to be certain modes of sexual intercourse: those that involve exchange of bodily fluids, particularly in cases where the recipient may have small open wounds in the area of exchange through which the retrovirus can enter the bloodstream. This has led to the codification of certain "safe-sex" guidelines which are all too easily and frequently ignored.

No-one is safe. Particularly no sexually active gay man is safe. Celibacy is a safeguard of sorts; but even this protection can be illusory—considering the syndrome's protracted incubation period—for who was celibate six years ago?

Eli sits on Robbie's bed in Robbie's bedroom, holding a framed portrait photograph of Robbie that Anna (indulging his charming vanity) gave him for Christmas several years ago. Eli doesn't look up (my steps silent in sheepskin slippers) so I look at him for a moment. On the fourth finger of his right hand is a large ring: between the knuckles a semicircle of heavy silver etched with dark intaglio scrawls and punctuated by an oblong-cut black stone (jet, obsidian, onyx) and three slivers of pale jade. The hand is large, heavy-knuckled, scarred with the memories of childhood fistights, and spread with fine hairs a few shades darker than the skin; a smaller ring, two thin cross-sections of silver sandwiching a white that might be ivory, foots the top pinky knuckle.

He looks up. "Who is this handsome man?" he asks friendlily.

"My friend Robbie. This was his room. It's the available one."

"Oh," he says. His gaze takes in all Robbie's clutter. "I thought it was supposed to be unfurnished?"

"It will be, by tomorrow evening. That's what I was on the phone about. The floor's going to be sanded and resealed next week, and then the walls repainted. It won't be ready to be occupied till the first."

"What color? The walls."

"I don't know. Probably landlord-white, unless I get inspired."

"I like this color," he says, considering.

So do I, although I was against Robbie's painting a room with only one window matte aubergine. "It's a touch claustrophobic," I note.

He stands up, returns the photograph gently to the bedside table. "Paint the ceiling pale greyish-lavender," he recommends, "and bleach the floor." He shrugs, laughs. "It's not my money. Could I have some more coffee? What happened to Robbie? He doesn't seem to have taken anything much with him."

I lean against the doorframe and stare up at him. Even without the heels of his boots he'd be some six inches taller than I. "You can't take anything much with you to the crematorium." Eli's eyes are large and brown and somehow blank. "He died three weeks ago."

"Jesus," he whispers. "I'm sorry. That was tactless." He looks at the floor, tips the pointed toe of his right foot three inches inward. The boots' color is similar to the walls'. "AIDS?" he asks.

I nod.

"Jesus," he says again, slowly, expressively.

This is what it is like to watch your friend die of AIDS: tones of voice become important because your fine, nuanced vocabulary cannot express what you feel.

Calmly, calmly. We will adjourn to the kitchen for another cup of coffee and to discuss the ramifications of his maybe moving in. Eli will pull a chair out from the kitchen table and sit, with the unconscious calculated grace, the flair, the reasoned confined heat of the contemporary young urban gay man. One arm over the back of the chair as he lights a cigarette. The knees spread wide on slightly buckled ankles so that the layers of soft cloth at his fly will buckle and display two of four metal buttons. His eyes will follow the serene practiced ease of my movements as I grind coffee beans from the freezer, fill the bright red-enameled kettle and put it on a burner, fold the paper filter. *Et cetera.* My hands will not falter, will not tremble. Capable. Precise. Perhaps he will admire my hands—not so much their capability, their precision, as their fine bones, the long slender fingers, the well-tended nails and cuticles. I will feel a faint *frisson,* knowing (for all my fifteen years seniority) I am desirable.

It will lead nowhere. It will come to nothing. I am scared to death.

It is a bright cold morning in early January, the air as sharp and chilled as a sterile scalpel. On the deck I lean over the railing, past a pot of desiccated tarragon (brown leaves like so many minute daggers), a dense aromatic astringent mat of creeping thyme. Eli's hand presses lightly against the small of my back. "Breathe deep," he instructs. I comply as well as I can past the obstruction in my throat. Salt glazes my eyes.

"Are you okay?" he asks when at length I straighten up.

"Yes."

Concern has made him squint; thin lines etch the fine skin around his eyes. "You cared for him a lot."

"Yes, more coffee would be nice."

He follows me into the kitchen. "Tea," he says. "Tea would be better. Weak tea with honey and lemon. If you've got it. Sit down."

Impelled by Eli's generous compassion and a weak desire to be cared for, I sit, lean my head on the butcherblock tabletop. "You're right," I murmur. Everything he needs to make tea is, in this kitchen, out in the open, in plain sight, and already he strikes me as capable and kind; he'll need no help from me. Twyla comes into the kitchen talking to herself, rubs against my leg, leaps onto the table and sits beside my head, begins to wash.

"Who are you, Eli?" I ask of my left forearm. "Why do

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you live in San Francisco? Why are you looking for a place to live?" I hear him bustling around behind me, the click and shuffle of boots on tile.

"I'm a nurse," he says. "I've been in San Jose for a couple years, but I just got a job at S. F. General so I moved up here last month. I've been staying with friends."

"Why here, though? Why San Francisco?"

"Why not? I'm from Montana originally; I don't want to be there. For one thing, I hate snow. I like living where getting through winter doesn't require survivalist tactics."

"A nurse," I say. "Robbie died at San Francisco General."

"I'm not on the AIDS ward. Not yet." I hear tea being poured. He sets a mug before me. "Drink this. That's where I want to be, though. Is that enough reason for San Francisco? Who's this gorgeous creature?" he asks, sitting down, holding out his hand for Twyla's inspection.

"Twyla."

"Tharp?"

"Thirp. It's a noise she makes."

She pushes her head into his open palm. "Aren't you a charmer," he tells her. "I like your apartment, Tim."

"Thank you."

"But I was hoping to get a place before the end of the month. My friends are getting tired of having me around. How's the tea?"

"Fine." I sip. Under the tartness of lemon is a faint breath of cinnamon. "Very good." I like him, I decide, on short notice. His thick black hair (styled and gelled into a becomingly punkish neo-brushcut) and his ginger mustache bristle assertively. His dark eyes sit comfortably in his face.

This is what it is like to watch someone you cherish die of AIDS: he changes and changes but stops learning, stops growing, stops becoming; he dies long before death claims him.

Eli holds his mug in both hands so that steam condenses on the hairs of his mustache. The doorbell rings twice, preëmptively. The mug returns to the table; the hands, surprised, splay out on either side.

"Dan and Anna," I say. "Robbie's family. They're coming to pack up his stuff. I asked them for lunch. Will you stay too? Please. Maybe we can work something out: an accommodation, a timetable."

After a moment he smiles slowly. "I'll think about it," he says. "You should let them in."

Footsteps on the stairs, a door gently closed. "They have a key."

"Tim?" Anna calls.

Standing up, I call back, "In the kitchen." Eli stands too, politely.

Anna and Dan come, flushed, exercised, mournful, around the corner. "Hello," they say.

"Dan," I say. "Anna. Good morning." They reciprocate my greeting kisses with surprising warmth; Dan's embrace is remarkably, tenderly, affectionate—considering his gender-identity and affectional preference. He does not look well. "This is Eli."

"Hello," Eli says and, like a trouper, shakes hands.

"Eli's just made us some tea. Will you join us? I haven't started lunch yet. Or I could make coffee?"

"No, thanks, Tim," says Dan. "I think we'd better get started."

"Okay. Do you want help?"

"No," says Dan, and goes.

"Not yet," Anna says apologetically, "not in the bedroom." She starts to follow her husband, then, an afterthought, "His clothes, Tim? They're taken care of?"

"Taken care of . . ." I breathe. "Yes. Anything you and Dan don't want. Chris will take them, gratefully. He and Robbie wear the same size."

"Oh!"

"I'll take everything to be cleaned on Monday."

"Dividing up the spoils," she whispers.

"Oh, Anna. This is how it is. It's hard. Chris doesn't *want* three new suits, not at this price. But he can use them. Robbie knew that."

She sighs. "I know," she says, and follows Dan.

I follow her as far as the dining room to retrieve my cigarettes. Eli stands in the doorway, watching me. "It is hard," he says.

I nod my agreement. I light a cigarette. I stare outside. "Robbie's will," I say, "was admirably precise. He left Twyla to me. His savings and life insurance and the proceeds of anything that gets sold go jointly to Dan, Anna and his father. Dan and Anna have first refusal on everything tangible; what they don't want is mine to dispense as I choose. You look about the same size as Robbie and Chris: would you like some new clothes?"

"I don't think so," he says carefully.

"I feel like a ghoul. 'Dividing up the spoils.' Lunch," I say, "the subject at this juncture is lunch. Messing around in the kitchen. Talk to me while I work."

It seems unlikely that Dan and Anna will want much of Robbie's furniture. None of it's very good, and surely their holdings duplicate most of the pieces, more stylishly.

I like Eli. He seems considerate and capable. We can work out an arrangement.

It seems unlikely Eli will have much furniture of his own. I will offer Robbie's to him. Otherwise I'll have to hold an estate-sale or give it to charity. Robbie would prefer it go to someone charming, like Eli. As he wanted Chris to get his clothes.

These plans. These arrangements. These contingencies. Oh, Robbie, am I as cold-blooded as this moment I feel? Dying is the easy part.

Dying is not the easy part. Dying is not easy. I don't want to remember how to die.

Eli pulls a chair out from the kitchen table and sits easily, one arm over the back of the chair as he lights a cigarette. His knees spread wide so that the layers of worn denim at his fly buckle and display two of four metal buttons; the lowest of the four, in code, is unfastened. He watches me forage through cupboards, drawers, refrigerator. My hands falter, tremble.

"Would you like some help?" he asks.

"Probably. But since I don't know what I'm doing I can't ask for it."

He grins. "Then what shall I talk about?"

"Tell me," I say, "why you in particular are uniquely qualified to be my new flatmate."

"Oh, my," says Eli, and, with many pauses for deliberation, "I'm quiet. I don't know many people so I won't be wanting to host large parties. On the other hand, I *like* parties, so if you want to have them I'll help. I can cook. I'm neat. I smoke and drink in moderation but don't do any other drugs. I like cats. Twyla likes me." Indeed, she sits in his lap. He spreads his hands. "I like the flat. I like the neighborhood, the view; I like your taste in art and design. I like *you*. I—" here the longest pause—"think I would have liked Robbie. From all the evidence. I'm very . . . careful."

"Safe?" I ask mockingly.

"Safe," he agrees. "I'm not going to die any time soon."

"Not of AIDS anyway."

"No."

"Confident, too. A paragon of value." I decant the blender-soufflé into its dish and slip it in the oven. "You pass the test. If you want. Help me set the table."

"Flatware?" His voice is flat, dazed.

"Middle drawer."

I go out to the dining room, clear off the table and lay four placemats, napkins, and glasses from the corner cupboard. Eli appears with fistsful of gleaming silverplate. "That's Robbie's," I say. "Oh—never mind. I'd like to use it one last time. As I said, the room won't be ready till the first. I can't get around that. But if you don't mind being primitive and camping out in the living room you could move in anytime. Staying with a friend, as it were. I'll want a deposit, but the rent's covered for the rest of the month."

"Easy as that?" he asks dully.

"Easy as that. There's an agreement that'll need your signature—I'll show it to you—but we can leave that till the first, give you some breathing room."

"I'll have to think about it," says Eli.

"But you'll stay for lunch?" I ask contritely, appalled by my own briskness. "It'll be ready in about half an hour."

"I think I'll take a walk around the neighborhood," he says. "But I'll be back for lunch. Thank you, Tim."

He looks at the toes of his boots for a moment, then turns and leaves. His heels sound on the stairs.

I look in the door of Robbie's room. Anna and Dan have stripped the bed; a box of folded blankets and linens sits by the door. Anna and Dan sit on the bare mattress. Huddled together like orphaned children, Dan's bright head on Anna's shoulder, they leaf through one of Robbie's many photo albums. I won't disturb them just now.

This is what it is like to remember someone you loved who has died of AIDS: it is far too easy to forget that there was a time before his illness; that he was (for seven of the almost nine years you knew him) alive and well and alert and splendid; that he was not always a focus for pain.

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These days my response to any stimulus is contingent on grief.

The first thing Dan does, seated at table while I serve the soufflé, is pick up his fork and say, "This is Robbie's silver."

"His dishes too, Dan," I say, choking on his clumsiness. "A memorial gesture, poorly considered. An excess of sentimentality. I'm sorry. I'll wash them and pack them up for you this evening."

"It's only plate," says Anna apologetically, "and we have my mother's sterling, Dan. And it's not a full service." (Four complete place settings plus a few extras and a couple of serving pieces. Victorian. Robbie picked them up in an antique shop, at a good price because so many were missing. He always intended trying to match the pattern.) "Do we need to clutch everything he owned to us, Dan?" she asks gently. "Other people loved him too."

"What's the 'P' stand for?" Eli asks. He is examining the scrolled, foliated handle of his salad fork. He looks up into our silence, smiles nervously. "The monogram. It's a 'P.' Whose initial?"

After a moment I say, "Mine. Robbie found it very amusing."

Dan looks down into his lap. On the table his right hand twitches. Anna brushes her hair off her face, wide-eyed.

I dispense the plates efficiently, Eli passes the salad, Anna pours the wine. When everyone is served Dan lifts his fork again and says, "This looks awfully good, Tim. Thank you."

"It smells delicious," Anna says.

I look at Eli. The skin around his delicate brown eyes crinkles briefly. Then he lowers his head. Almost whispering, almost under his breath, he says, "Thank You, Lord, for Your grace and the favor of this meal. Thank You also for bringing me here, among these my new friends. And thank You for letting me know Robbie in the only way, now, that I can; please let me know him better, so I may remember him as he deserves. Hold him safely, Lord. Keep us well. Amen." He lifts his fork, lifts his head, his eyes clear and brown and brimming. "I don't usually do that," he says hesitantly, "—say Grace. It seemed . . . useful. I'm not sure why."

"Thank you, Eli," Anna and I say together. I am stunned by gratitude, by the fragility of my feelings, by the delicacy of his gesture.

"Thank you, Eli," whispers Dan.

We eat in silence until Eli says, "Tim, I've decided to accept your offer, with thanks. *If* I can choose the color paint."

I look at him. I look at Dan. They look back at me. I look down at my fork. Around the acanthus leaves that surround my initial on the handle the silver is dark with tarnish.

Grace. From the Latin gratia *favor, charm, thanks, from* gratus *pleasing, grateful; akin to the Sanskrit* gṛṇāti *he praises.* □

THE MAGIC HOUR

Georgann Eubanks

What Zona Floyd wants to know more than anything else at the moment is how they stop the traffic long enough to paint the bridges in New York City. Everything looks so worn out up here, even the cars which stretch in rows as far as she can see—above, below and beside them, winding along in every lane of the cloverleaf. In the nine years of her whole life, Zona has never seen so many people driving places on a Sunday morning.

She does not ask her question about the paint, however. She sits very still, taking in all the sights and thinking hard. Zona saves up all kinds of things in her mind for some future time when she is famous and has to tell her life story to the press.

Aunt Adair is still asleep in the back seat with a little blue sofa pillow mashed over her eyes. Uncle Zack is fidgety since he is the one who has to inch their big red Ford over the spiraling bridge. He has the serious look of a trapeze artist about to take his first tiny steps across a highwire.

Zona decides the people in charge of New York City must have given up on painting anything years ago. The lamp posts and bridge railings alternate in patches of green and a mean rusty color that reminds her of her second-hand swingset back home—the one her Daddy found as a surprise for her fifth birthday.

Zona has looked forward to this vacation since before Easter. It is her first trip north, past Washington, D.C. anyway. Zona's aunt and uncle are always scheming to take her places she's never been. They love to show her off as if she were their own child. Zona knows they are crazy about her, but she also knows they plan all these adventures because they feel sorry for her. Otherwise they would probably stay at home. Aunt Adair hates to travel. "I don't understand why anybody would *ever* want to go to a foreign country," she says when Zona and Zack watch the *National Geographic* specials on TV.

Zona's Daddy is in the slammer ten-to-twelve, or at least that is what Uncle Zack whispers high above her head and into the ears of other grown-ups when they ask if she is his daughter. After he has told the secret, Uncle Zack will look down at her, wink and say to his friend, "She's my china peach!"

It is always the same. The person Zack has just told will examine Zona's serious face and then make some cheerful comment about how pretty she is—how the combination of her rosy white skin, her thick blue-black hair and heavy eyelashes are so striking. And every time, Uncle Zack will light up like he's never heard it before, and say, "Why, thank you. And she's real smart, too!" Zona loves Uncle Zack because he is so easygoing and friendly to everybody. But he is also kind of weak and sad-faced a lot of the time. Aunt Adair, on the other hand, is hard as a rock. Zona has discovered lots of things lately about adults that make her feel disappointed. She is determined to be smarter when she grows up.

One of Aunt Adair's friends, Polly Mathews, is always telling Adair how Zona is so exotic looking she could be on TV. "You'd never have to work another day in your life," Polly says to Adair. Adair loves the attention, but Zona is getting sick of it, though deep down, she knows she is special, even if the kids at school say that her Daddy is a jailbird behind her back.

Zona's mother works as an Assistant in Community Living at the North Carolina Retardation Retreat in Abbeyville which is near the penitentiary. When her Momma works the swing shift, Zona sleeps over with Zack and Adair in their fancy brick house. Zona stays out back in the trailer with her Momma the rest of the time. Zona's Momma won't talk about the prison sentence. No one has bothered to tell Zona what the words of the sentence are. Sometimes Zona looks in the Bible trying to figure out which sentence they gave her Daddy to think about when they locked him up.

On trial day, Zona's Daddy sat with his back to her in the cafeteria near the courthouse. He was allowed to have lunch there with his lawyer, but his family was not permitted to talk to him.

Zona wanted to run between the tables to him, to tell him that he must not go away, that everybody was acting so funny, that he had messed up everything. She wanted him to squeeze her and come home right away and let her ride in the wheelbarrow while he pushed it. She wanted him to take her out on the back roads in his truck and sing "I Love To Tell The Story," his favorite church song. His voice is so good. Zona realized that she would never forget that cafeteria, the ugly Band-aid colored walls, the metal folding chairs that scraped across the floor with a sharp, high-pitched noise when somebody pulled one of them out from under the table and sat down with their lunch tray. Nobody else there—all those men in suits and ladies with high heels—knew what she was going through. The chatter of dishes in the kitchen was such a cold sound.

Uncle Zack and her mother were sitting there silently. They were mad at her Daddy and afraid for him too. No one could eat. Aunt Adair had been so upset that morning that she had stayed home. "My brother is a fool," she said and has never spoken his name since. At that point, Uncle Zack broke down and cried, which Zona hated to watch.

"Uncle Zack," Zona says, "I never knew New York City was built on rocks." They have just come down a ramp and onto a straightaway. Uncle Zack is accelerating the car like a racehorse clearing the starting gate. Great stone cliffs rise above them. They have made it to the Cross Bronx Expressway, heading toward White Plains. The traffic has finally thinned out.

Monstrous red and gray buildings loom ahead. Laundry hangs from some of the sooty windows, and television antennas crowd the tenement roofs like the upside-down legs of a million spiders. Zona tries to count each window in the buildings, figuring she can multiply that number by three or four and come up with a good guess about the population of the Bronx. But the car moves too fast. She loses track before she has hardly begun.

"This is awful," Zack says. "I wouldn't stop along here even if your Aunt Adair got carsick again." Zack cranes his neck to get one more look at a compact car sitting in the emergency lane. The car is burned and stripped beyond recognition. Zack shakes his head.

"Will we get to New Hampshire today?" Zona asks.

"If the gas stations stay open and the creeks don't rise," Zack says, smiling until the tiny creases in his face look like a roadmap.

"There aren't any creeks up here." Zona says. Zack must be pulling her leg again. He loves to do that.

"Zona-babe, find us some good music on the radio, but keep it low so Adair's medicine can keep working." Zack throws his head toward the back seat and then rolls his eyes as if he and Zona share a secret partnership that Zack prefers to the one he has with his wife.

Zona twists the radio dial to ON, and the first thing they hear is a man's voice raving about something in a foreign language. He sounds like her Daddy's lawyer at the trial. Zona imagines the man's tongue dancing and flopping all around inside his cheeks, shooting out the strings of words she can't slice apart and make any sense of in her mind. She is skeptical about finding Barbra Streisand on this radio. Barbra is Uncle Zack's favorite.

Adair insisted that they go out to a restaurant for supper when they finished unloading the car at the fishing camp. Zona can't believe Aunt Adair has ordered something for supper called New England clam chowder, since what she threw up last night in Delaware looked much the same. Zona and Zack decided on hamburgers because the waitress talked so funny and seemed to be in a big hurry.

The hamburgers are soggy with mayonnaise. Warm mayonnaise makes Zona gag. She is having a hard time finishing. She jams her straw into the ice in her Coke and watches the fizz rise from the bottom of the glass.

In New Hampshire, everything is very different from the tangle of cities they have just driven through. Zona had imagined that she would see lots of little maple syrup trees with buckets attached to them, like her schoolbook talked about in the chapter on New England. But she has not seen a single bucket. The trees *are* different-looking, and the villages seem friendly with their freshly-painted churches and old-fashioned houses. They remind Zona of the color photos of Europe she saw in a magazine at the dentist's. When they first arrived she tried to picture what it must look like in winter with the snow.

"Now listen here, Zack," says Aunt Adair, whose chubby face is as pale as her soup, "when you go to rent the boat, you be sure they give you a child-size life preserver for Zona—one that fits her right. That water scares me to death."

"It's the law, Adair. We have to have licenses, too. Keep your shirt on." Uncle Zack wipes his mouth with his napkin. Everyone says that he puts up with a lot from Adair.

"I promised Mary," Adair says impatiently.

"Your sister-in-law worries less than you do, Dair. You know I'd never let a thing happen to Miss Arizona Lyn Floyd." Zona loves to hear her full name pronounced like she has just won a contest. Zona's mother named her after the state she most wants to visit—the home of the Grand Canyon. As a result, Zona loves geography.

Uncle Zack puts his hand on Zona's head and grabs a loose handful of her curly hair. "We know how to behave, right, kiddo?"

"When do we fish?" Zona squirms in her seat. She is eager to find out what is hiding in the deep waters of Lake Winnisquam. It is the darkest water she has ever seen. Uncle Zack has told her the fish are different up north—real big and fat in order to survive the frozen winters.

"We fish at the crack o' dawn," says Zack. He looks for the waitress so he can pay the check.

The next morning before daylight, Zona is sitting on the toilet with the lid down. Her legs dangle as she watches

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Zack shave. "How do you know about what kind of bait we need, Uncle Zack?" They are whispering again because Adair is sleeping just outside, in the only other room in the cabin.

"Depends on the fish you want to catch, just like home." Zack's face is striped with narrow shreds of shaving cream. The familiar lime smell makes Zona feel warm and comfortable.

"I thought we'd start with night crawlers, big suckers," Zack says. "They're in the fridge. You can handle that, can't you?"

Zona nods. She is not completely indifferent to the clear sticky liquid that worms are covered with, nor is she wild about the bloody dirt that oozes out of them when you stick them with the hook. But she always gives a convincing performance when she puts on her bait. She is no sissy.

After he wipes his face with a towel, Zack pulls a thick flannel shirt over his hard, skinny arms, and Zona, who has been dressed for at least thirty minutes, follows him to the kitchenette in the room where Adair is balled up under the covers.

Zack had made bologna sandwiches on white bread for them the night before. Using only the light from the open refrigerator, he packs the cooler, first with ice and then with Coke in small bottles—the only kind that tastes right, as he always says. He snitches two of Adair's Hershey bars with almonds for their dessert. He lifts the candy level with his eyes for Zona's inspection. They share a mischievous look and then Zack drops the candy bars and the sandwiches into the cooler and closes the lid. The refrigerator door yawns shut behind them as they leave Adair in the dark.

Outside, the strongest stars still shine like a crown of diamonds way above the tall evergreen trees, though a faint pinkish cast is about to overtake them as it spreads up from the horizon. Zack and Zona make clouds with their breath as they haul their gear down to the dock. Zack has rented a canoe rather than one of the flat, two-seater motor boats with electric engines.

They load their rods and picnic into the middle of the canoe. Zack helps Zona with her life preserver. She cautiously seats herself up front. Zack takes the back of the canoe and then expertly dips his long paddle into the water, pushing them forward soundlessly, out onto the still black lake. Zona faces ahead, delighted by their solitude and the wide view of hills which surrounds them. Zack whispers as if they are in church.

"Nothing quite like the beginning or the end of the day. That's when the fish are hungry. You know, Zona, they make movies early in the morning and late in the afternoon when the light is pink and orange like this. I read all about it. In Hollywood they call it 'the magic hour.' Everything is at its most beautiful in this kind of light. But it only lasts a short while."

Zona thinks of the dirty cities they have come through to reach this place. She thinks of the trailer and her mother's exhausted face. It seems so long now, she can barely picture her Daddy. The water has begun to glow like a mirror. Zona can feel the warm colors on her face. Even the sleeves of her plain brown jacket have turned a sweet chocolate shade. The light on this lake makes her believe her secret dreams—that she will rise in her life, be famous, accomplish wondrous things. She is full of energy. The wind makes tears in her eyes.

When Zona was six, the year her father went to federal prison on drug charges, her mother received a phone call. In those first days, the ring of the telephone always startled them. There had been so much confusion during the pre-trial hearings and then the trial. Their lives had even been threatened. Zona's mother, Mary, had no idea her husband had been up to such things with strangers from out of town. She stumbled over her words whenever she tried to talk to Zona about it.

The phone call that day turned out to be from Denby's Dance Studio. They were calling all the parents of first graders in the Abbey County School System.

Mary covered the receiver with her palm and asked Zona if she wanted to take dance lessons.

"I already *know* how to dance, Momma," Zona said, and then she clicked her heels and spun around quickly like the high school students on *Fame*—Zona's favorite TV program at the time. Mary laughed for a good five minutes and reached to give Zona a big hug before she remembered to hang up the phone.

Uncle Zack hands Zona her rod and reel and they each take a worm from the paper carton. The canoe is drifting a few yards offshore. "This is the ticket," Uncle Zack had said when he pulled his paddle out of the water a moment before. Zona feels a little off balance casting her line from the wobbling canoe, but Uncle Zack praises her toss. The bobber makes a tiny splash and settles in its circle of water. Zack throws to the other side of the boat, far away, along the rocky shore. They wait.

Fishing is like nothing else, except maybe singing, Zona thinks. She believes she has a very mature and well-controlled voice for her age, though she has never told anyone about it. "The fish go about their business in secret," Zona's Daddy told her once when they were down at Mr. Binner's pond. Her Daddy had a very fancy rod and reel and was showing her how to cast. "We don't have any idea what they do down there, and they can't see us either until we catch them." Her Daddy grinned.

Adair has given Zona piano lessons since she was five. Zack takes Zona every chance he gets to the old movie musicals that Adair will approve for her to see. Sometimes the music makes her want to cry, but Zona sits in the dark theatre beside Uncle Zack, squinting and tilting her head back to stop the tears. She knows she is the strongest one.

Zona only lets loose when she practices the piano in private after school or when she sings to her big imaginary audience in the trailer. She makes her own lyrics. "Time heals all wounds," she sings, scanning the audience for understanding and sympathy, "and time wounds all heels." This is actually a line Zona heard Adair use in a serious conversation with her Momma. Her Momma was crying. Someday Zona will sing in public about all she has learned and heard, and everyone will be amazed.

The sun is like a bonfire up the hill now, beyond the trees. The pink part of the sky is being painted over by strokes of orange and then yellow. Whirling wisps of steam dance like ballerinas across the glassy water. In the distance, Zona and Zack hear the flat honk of a duck. Zona sighs.

When they came to take her Daddy away, Zona had been sitting on the den floor at his feet, drawing Valentine hearts with a red crayon on her tablet with the big blue lines. Her Momma was not home. Zona heard a voice on a loudspeaker outside and the roar of a car engine. Her Daddy rose from his chair and pulled aside the curtains. A blue light flashed on his face—once, then twice. He grabbed Zona roughly off the floor, carried her to the back of the trailer and put her in her room. She began to cry, not from any idea of what was about to happen, but from the way her Daddy had lifted her up and squeezed her so fiercely by the legs and shoulders. One of her shoes fell off in the hallway.

Her bobber begins to travel across the water like a little satellite. Zona shivers with excitement. She holds her breath. She cannot take her eyes off the red and white plastic ball to signal Uncle Zack. She must be ready to pull. She imagines the fish down deep, pushing at her worm with its nose, just like the seals did with their beach balls at Marineland in Florida where Zack and Adair took Zona last year.

The bobber dives and is gone. Zona jerks her rod toward the sky. She has snagged him. He must be big. The whole canoe seems to be moving toward the place where the bobber disappeared.

"Steady," Zack commands. "A little at a time. You've got him." Zack is ecstatic. He laughs like a boy as he gets the net ready. Zona can barely turn the crank on her reel.

"Oh my gosh," Zona says when the fish surfaces near the boat. The water around the fish looks like it is boiling. The fish fights so hard Zona cannot lift it clear of the water. Her rod seems ready to break. It is bent in the shape of an upside-down "U." A-E-I-O-U, Zona hums in her mind.

Zack scoops the angry fish into the net and lifts it. The net drips little pearls of clear water. The fish twists wildly in the criss-cross of strings.

"Did I tell you, did I tell you, Zona? They are whoppers up here. Holy cow, babe, this is a *whale*!" Uncle Zack slaps the fish down on the bottom of the boat and secures it with the toe of his boot. The fish looks mean. It is green with a silver belly, maybe a foot long. The fish's mouth is opening and closing, trying to breathe, but there is no water. Uncle Zack twists the hook loose with some difficulty. The motion reminds Zona of her mother's fingers when she does needlepoint to pass the time. She wishes her mother could see this.

"Onto the stringer for you, big buddy," Zack says. "Keep it up Zona, and Adair will have to go out and buy a bigger frying pan."

Zona wants to sing out loud across the water. I caught a fish in New Hampshire which is in New England almost to Canada, nearly in another country. I have been places. I am exotic. I am a singer and a dancer and a fisherman. I am smart and pretty.

They didn't catch anything else. Uncle Zack had one nibble, but whatever it was just got his bait. They paddled to the middle of the lake and ate their picnic in the full sunlight.

Aunt Adair made three pictures with her Kodak Instamatic when Zona and Zack first came back in the canoe. The fish was very heavy, but Zona held it beside her and looked at it instead of the camera when Adair told her to pose. When they get back to North Carolina, she will ask Momma if she can send a copy of the picture to her Daddy, but they will have to keep it a secret since it is really Adair's snapshot.

"He'll keep a day or we can cook him tonight," Zack says, when they get back from shopping late that afternoon. "It's your fish, Zona."

The fish is still tied on the stringer, swimming under the dock where they left him. "Can I go see how he's doing?" Zona asks.

"May I," says Aunt Adair.

"Sure," says Uncle Zack.

Now the opposite end of the sky is putting on its show. Little broken pieces of cloud like a string of purple beads are draped across the orange sky. It reminds Zona of fresh blueberries in a wide bowl of canteloupe. Zona decides New Hampshire is a handsome place, so quiet and cool—not like June in Abbeyville or Florida. She runs down to the dock with her jacket flying loose from her sides like a Superman cape. She sits on the weathered wooden planks, careful not to snag her corduroys on a splinter. The fish has swum up under the dock. She must tug at the rope to see him. He is passive and alone, a dark green submarine down there. His gills swing out and in. Zona can see his backbone, a hard ridge that forms the crest between his bulging sides. Little fins wave near his face, to keep him in balance. He seems very far away, even though the perfectly clear water is only about two feet deep under the dock.

Zona wonders if he knows what has happened to him, if the slender rope that runs through his mouth and out his left gill is uncomfortable. "Fish are dumb," her friend Kennedy said once when Zona was talking about the little sunfish she catches by herself now in Mr. Binner's pond. This is definitely the biggest fish she has ever landed.

Zona studies the view across the water. Now that the long rays of sunlight are behind her back, stretching out beyond her, she can make out the white trunks of the birches that are scattered among the evergreens in the woods on the other side of the lake. They are slender and straight like little iron columns. They almost look painted in their rows over there.

Zona reaches down and pulls the stringer. It is difficult, but she manages to loosen the loop and pull the ring that holds the fish. He fights and splashes as she brings the line through his mouth. Zona's heart is racing. She feels the fish's power straining against her outstretched limbs. With one last tug, she clears the string from his mouth. The fish drops down again and disappears into deeper water with one quick sweep of his tailfin. Hello and goodbye, hello and goodbye, Zona sings quietly to a complicated melody she has just made up. She crosses her arms and hugs herself, fills her lungs with the chilly evening wind. Zona memorizes the scene. It is the magic hour, she remembers. ☐

ON VOYAGE

Sharon White

They went ashore and looked about them. The weather was fine. There was dew on the grass, and the first thing they did was to get some of it on their hands and put it to their lips, and to them it seemed like the sweetest thing they had ever tasted.
Graenlendinga Saga

1

The second hour. We sit up in the tree like red leaves. From the tree we can see all the way to Mexico. A large body of land in the south. We can also see houses some blue some red and dogs and a family of raccoons in the bushes down the cliff. We can all see what we want to see from so high in the tree. But we don't like it up here at all. The little town below is nothing compared to Mexico where we were all born. We put on wings in the first hour of this grand earth and flew north. It's just now that we've landed. Our wings are red. We all have the same voice. And we all sing like mad. All the trees and fields are green in this strange land. We fear we're here forever. Our wings stuck with sap to the tree a big old maple that grows and shivers on the cliff. Our hearts thump thump thump. The night comes fast. The day goes fast. Our lives wear down our lives wear quick our lives wear thin like stockings in the tree.

Can we be cut down we yell. No one looks up. We write it in blue on the trunk of the tree. It stinks up here put us down. No one comes. We want all sorts of things. Never beans. Perhaps the fruit of the mountains of Mexico. Purple and sweet and cooked up fast on our wings by the light of the moon.

When we were little kids we learned to curtsey and shake the hand of the bishop with our right hands. Our momma gave us pudding on the day the bishop came. And we all said God save the pudding and the bishop and dug in. In winter in deep winter we rode horses up on the glaciers of the high fearsome mountains of Mexico. In deep winter we ate no pudding and our momma went off into hiding. In deep winter the bishop was no fool. He stayed inside and sent us off to the highest cliffs. We hated it. Our food fit for lizards and rancid at best our entertainment the drear wind. So we made wings and set off at the first hour for the north.

We saw a big soft field but all the fields were trees. We landed in a tree. And the tree had green leaves.

The river runs over there the horses run over there the boy runs over there. Get us down we work for the bishop. He'll pay you well. He'll reimburse you with diamonds and a room full of flowers. The second hour we'll be here forever. No one in this town wants diamonds, they grow their own flowers. And in the far south Mexico cuts into our hearts and shivers in our wings. We'll get down yet. We'll get down soon.

2

9 December

I advised the dear little woman that she should wrap herself up in fur tight as she could so Anooko would find no entrance to her sweet form. This she did and through the night I watched in the bright light of blubber the man's efforts come to naught. He could not get in through her skins so to speak thus the bright hand of god and the purity of the angels persevered in this dark northland.

I have been here now for three long months. It is the worst of the winter. We daren't go outside the igloo for fear of freezing to our deaths. The men howl round the house like wolves. They refuse to come inside like civilized beings. They refuse to live with savages they say. Let them freeze. God watches over the good and does what he will with the others.

1 January

My boils are bad. I fear I may go blind. I have been told to drink seal's blood but the men have caught nothing for a month now. We hope that providence will support us in our need and supply us with food.

13 January

There's a man here who wants my head. He took away all my ink yesterday after I spent the morning melting snow and mixing up a fine bright batch of it. He is from the ship that was iced in a long time hence. He is quite crazy I think. He wears skins so thick he can hardly walk. The men call him old Stagoona. Stagoona hates me and turns his fearsome wrath on my innocent soul. He spits ink at my igloo and at my face if I so venture out from my house.

8 February

The storm is bad. Food is low. Almost blind.

3

Sir. This is a fertile country inhabited by sweet dispositioned savages who can be harnessed and used to good advantage. You must give them trinkets and then they are happy. There are also many dogs with pointed noses running in the extensive forests. Deep in said forests there is a tree of the softest bark of the deepest color orange. I have no doubt but that this is a special tree possessing rare powers.

In the woods there are cleared places where the savages have planted Indian corn and peases. And other roots not known on our native soil. Last night we captured a little savage from his sister and mother.

Two of the men sir were getting water in the fine brass buckets and a savage came up and took one of the buckets. The man fired at the savage and chaos ensued. The savages fled into the forest leaving a beautiful girl tall as our women and almost as fair. And her mother an old white haired figure and two little boys. We caught one of the children as hostage for the bucket. But the girl bit and kicked and cried out whenever we approached her. We watched her drag the old woman and the other boy into the forest after the savages. We still have in our possession the little boy savage and intend to convey him to England.

7

It's very black in here. We're stuck. Have been for a day. The darkness all up and down the length of our bodies. Like clouds we thought at first. Clouds block the sun. But we've learned something. It's not clouds. The sun gone and all down inside our little pool darkness is king. The worm is everybody's friend. He's my friend first. We kiss and it looks like fighting. When we were young we remembered the sun and long days on the dock crabbing. But now the hour comes in and reminds us of the endless repetition of the darkness. The worm kisses me but I fight him off. And the rest of us keep up a quiet crackling on the rock. Some of us feed all hours and others only at the high tide. The difference is age. We're the little ones and we eat what we can for as long as we can.

Out on the water two red figures are walking. I hear someone. All down inside us the orange color glows like wings of the dead orange oriole. The beach is covered with these birds. The beach is not visible from where we feed. The position of our bodies is something new the shape we take something new too. The darkness all around us a collar of barnacle secures us to the rock. We were much larger and could see what we wanted to see but in this new hour we take this shape and pray that the kind will release us from the responsibility of a soul.

On the beach the figures put up houses just small enough to look like pleasure homes. Replicas of an earlier time when we remember crabbing on the Gulf of Mexico and the large lonely fig tree in our grandmother's yard. Only three figs would this tree give and each fig was sacred. You must dust them off first but the taste and the tree grown from each fig is fantastic.

Out on the water the boat passes two red figures. We call up our king and show him the crab and the snail and the anemone born of the wind.

We call up the wind and call up the water and call up the sun. But darkness is king.

8

We came after three years journey to a kingdom that was the most beautiful place we had ever seen. The sky was full of birds with red feathers and the beak of a woodpecker and eyes that grow wider and darker as they fly. It is a rich land and the people therein are a peaceful tribe. A story is told there how one king, wanting to know if the soil of Persia was what gave the Persians their choleric nature, had all the soil of Persia brought into his own country and covered over with a carpet fashioned of the finest green silk. Then he had laid a table of the best cooked birds and fishes and fruits of his land. Pomegranates as big as heads and plums as dark as a rose. Then he invited all the kindest people in the reaches of his Kermania kingdom.

What happened was to be expected. The king picked up the largest pomegranate and crushed it in his queen's face and all the other kind Kermanians buffeted each other with fish eyes and chicken wings and boars' knuckles.

So it was proven. The soil of Persia was at fault.

9

In the seventh month of that year we set out with fifty men for the northwest and the river that flowed to the great rocky mountains. We had scant provisions. Enough maize and dried fish to hold us until we could procure fresh fish in the great river. We lost many of our men by starvation, the maize and fish not sufficient to stave off hunger. There were no fish in the river. I was left in the eighth month with twelve men and no food.

We abandoned the canoes and set off on foot, for we had come to the plains. We walked in the direction of the west thinking to come upon a patch of wood called an island by the indians, and a settlement therein. I had on my person a bar of chocolate from which I broke a piece and melted it in the water we drank that night. The 23rd of September. Already snow was on the ground. My men were making known to me that they could go no further. This flavored water revived them considerably. And the next morning we set out renewed. Towards the end of the day again they beseeched me to stop saying they could go no further. So once again I broke off another piece of the chocolate and melted it in the water. Again they were revived and much improved in spirits.

On the eighth day of the month when the great waters freeze, we came to a large lake in the far north. I went with three canadians to an island in the center of the lake. Here we found a great herd of caribou living on the small island and the bones of many others. There were no beasts that prey on the deer, perhaps accounting for their large size and the number of their herd. I thought that there must be much starvation in the cold months from the number of bones we found. We killed as many caribou as we could fit in the canoe and set off for the shore. The indians had no stories about this caribou island.

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When we came to the river my brother Wanague and his family took great spears and flipped the white fish one after another out of the river. Soon we had enough to last us the winter. Great sweet fish as big as a child. We took near one-thousand of them out of the river that day. The next days we spent drying the fish and making ready for the winter. I was not safe with anyone. The canadians in fear of me as an englishman and the indians like as not quick to kill me. I took on the garments of a savage and put dirt all over my face. In this way I lived for three years. And I can say that if it were not for the knowledge of a less savage world, I could have lived in contentment in this simple way until the end of my time.

11

We took our boat and followed the land that bent in on the sea or the sea that bent in on the land we knew not which. All is dark. Othere presses us forward. The sea is wild and spattered with ice. We cannot land. The people are hostile. We followed the land for five days west the Great Bear to the north. Othere says there is no fear in his heart. We sail turning with the sea or the land we know not which. My stomach is full of bile. On the shore animals move the green light of the north in their eyes and teeth. It is harder than we could have thought. The night and the trees on the edge of the sea more night and the water, night more black elements and nothing to hold us to a place. We killed sixty horse whales in two days. The ship is full of the meat and tusks. The land is all waste land except where the Finns live for hunting in the winter and in summer for fishing in the sea. We plan to sail west around the land for three more days.

We are as far as any whale hunters ever go.

12

There were women on the dock, of the strangest beauty. They wore red woolen skirts and petticoats of the same deep red pulled up around their heads, the band enclosing their extraordinary oval faces.

They set up a howl when they saw me. They were taunting me for being unmarried, throwing rocks and dead fish at my face. I hurried off the dock and walked into the town. An old man called Martin came up and offered to take my baggage for me. The sky was luminescent grey and the white washed houses of the village were brilliant against the sky, broken here and there by the indigo blue of a man's leggings or the red skirt of a woman.

I walked straight to the old woman's cottage and they welcomed me, and shut the two doors so we could gather by the turf fire and the wind pushed against the wood outside.

Later two old men came to tell me stories and one was a dancer. I had brought my fiddle and I played what I knew but no one could dance to it.

Martin stopped by with a jug of poteen and we stayed that way—women crouched by the fire, men lined against the walls until late at night.

A woman came in, the sister of the man drowned between south and middle island last week in the storm. She asked to see the clothes of the dead man. We brought out a striped purse and a cap and a pair of torn indigo leggings, she set up a wild keening for they were her brother's.

The two doors of the house closed shut, the fire dim. There were no windows, the turf smoldering.

In the morning I left for the south island where the living is not as primitive.

14

First there is the English Peacock found in grass houses, cleverly woven by the little river Isis. People take quick looks at these rare spectacular birds as they sit on the stone wall near the pub and drink their beer and sherry. The women all wear long dresses and pendant earrings, opal, emeralds, glittering moonstone. The men are vain birds, preening themselves and rearranging their cravats. The peacocks are amused. Sometimes squirrels sit in the branches of the green trunks. Sometimes other birds, sparrows and such, join the peacocks. At dusk the peacocks start up their song, the people are afraid and go inside. The river is still. The fish listen. It is louder than anyone can hear. The peacocks are screeching, pretending they are the voices of all the men and women dangling their legs into the Isis.

15

We sailed for a year around those hot islands looking for her uncle who disappeared several years back.

We befriended a whale and this was lucky. I could take a ride on the back of the whale so to speak whenever I desired. It was lovely. We had showers in the spout of the whale. They were carefree days and we never found her uncle, which was just as well. We always thought that he was, in all actuality, back in the states and married again under a different name. We kept this from her. Oh how many things did we hide? I was a boy when we started and now I'm a man. Before we went on the expedition to find her uncle, I had been around the world in a curragh, an old celtic boat, narrow, delicately balanced.

I met a native on Gladiolina and fell in love. She was gorgeous. Red hair, dark skin, round buttocks. I learned how to be a man. I killed off all her family and made a big house for myself on the island. This broke us apart. I left for the next island Martinolina. I met a white woman there who lived in a grass hut. She took me to this hut and introduced me to her passionate mother.

It was like Circe. I couldn't get away. I grew a beard and learned to polish my legs with snake skin.

I longed for the taste of fresh cow's milk. I was past adolescence, I was into the middle years. They brought me goats and sheep and lizards hoping to milk something from them that would please me. I grew thin. I went away finally in my curragh, warped with the hot tropical sun and my body seared to a blackness. ☐

DAVID SCHLOSS

THE ANIMA

There are certain days when, having lived in one place
long enough, everything becoming nostalgic—the smell of
wet air at the change of seasons for over twenty years,
earlier times evoked by the continuity of remembrance,
like less worthy men stepping on more wounded underlings
in the scrabble for success—I don't know what she wants,
but I'd better figure it out, I think to myself, fast,
while a desperate anima inside me starts to come out.

By accident, I point around the room like a broken man
selling off the handiwork of his life for some return:
I want to take his job—I'm like an auctioneer of his
sad items, the paltry effects I could buy up and trash.
Perhaps it is closer in congruous time to the bitter
experience that augmented him with a good or evil soul
driving me away from there in the fog of his misfortunes?
She puts her finger down my throat to calm the hungry waves.

What does it prove or mean? Let it be a puzzle to them,
she says, the damned don't change. They hang in there;
they cannot go anywhere—or they go with cowardice to face
the fact of others being constantly rebuked, mean fears
waiting there for them, standing back, never coming in:
the simple daily resistence of always averting my eyes,
my nose, from the vast problem of disbelief in myself—
that is, in others, as evidence of what I have become.

A goddess might do as angels will not, might intervene—
but her lips, when touching mine, parch, do not respond,
supplying me with weak stimulation, sympathy, saying,
You have less than half a lifetime to forgive the demands
of the monstrous diamond they form out of the desires,
hard, white, they cry out on the air. Oh, what a stone
you must once have placed in your heart. To save you,
it makes a beautiful shadow: why don't you come in under it?

SOLACE

Ehud Havazelet

Sunday mornings in winter, the boy waited for his father to awaken. Lying in bed, with the room chilled around him, he listened for the faint rumble of the water heater and then his father's slippers on the hardwood floor. Outside his window, the night shone blue as if cold reflected itself, and stars turned over like falling ice.

He hurried into the bathroom when his father was done, while the tiles still held warmth from the shower. The heater was good for only one shower at a time, and the boy took his in the evenings before the house cooled down. He pulled his clothes on in the corner, his black tie, already knotted, already in the collar of his white shirt. He brushed his teeth, splashed his face, and pulled the tie close to hide a missing button. When he opened the bathroom door, the smells from the kitchen were in the hall: cocoa, cinnamon rolls, strong coffee. The boy made his feet loud on the stairs so his father would hear him coming, in case he had not yet mixed whiskey with the coffee in his thermos. His father would be angry then.

He pushed the swinging door to the kitchen. His father sat at the table, straighter than any man he had ever seen, straw hat and newspaper before him on the immaculate white cloth. He had not heard. He held the big Stanley thermos in one hand, a bottle of Dewar's over the top with the other.

"Stuart."

The boy took a step back and watched the wooden door swing to a stop.

To reach the hospital after breakfast, they had to leave before dawn. The car door handle stung to the touch, and the vinyl seats radiated cold. While his father drove, Stuart pulled his jacket up and closed his eyes, the motion jarring him to full wakefulness.

Paterson's pre-dawn streets had once held out to him an excitement he could almost taste. The men in their long coats were spies; the barreling trucks, filled with machine guns and jewels; the cars that sped by without lights, fleeing gutted and smoking bank vaults on the other side of town. But his father and he had been making these weekly trips into New York for three years. Stuart pulled his jacket around him, closed his eyes, and moved toward his side of the seat, into the air heater's intermittent blast. His father sipped coffee and hummed show tunes, spirituals, tunneling after the headlights into the thinning dark.

They timed it right; they reached the George Washington Bridge for sunrise. Mists came off the river and Washington Heights was outlined in brightness. The suspension cables flickered by, singing, and the main support, just tingeing silver, sloped upward out of sight. His father said, "Take a look at that, would you? My God, just take a look at that."

Stuart opened his eyes, took in the view, then turned toward his father. His father had had several cups of his mixture; he was leaning forward as though about to stand. Pushing over the steering wheel so he could see it all, his father lifted his face to the light from the east.

The hospital Stuart's mother had died in was on Roosevelt Island, in the East River. Stuart was six when she died, and she had been ill all of his lifetime. There was a question of contagion and, not being a robust child, he was not allowed to see her often. That, at least, was the way he remembered it.

The first time was soon after she entered the hospital. Stuart remembered coming into the long ward and somehow, knowing which bed was hers, running directly to it. He remembered she looked very pretty and sad in her white gown, and that they had to leave because she was tired.

The other time was before she died. Her skin was puffy like a baby's and there were wide bruises around her eyes as if she'd been hit. Tubes were running into her and she couldn't have moved her arms if she'd wanted. She opened her eyes at one point and looked directly at Stuart, but he didn't know what she saw. When they took him away from the bed, he didn't want to see her anymore.

The hospital walls were green, the color of shallow water. Stuart's father assumed he would keep up. He walked ahead, pants floppy on his thin legs, briefcase swinging. The Volunteer Office did not open until 10 a.m., and they no longer bothered with it.

Men were lined up in the hallway, some in chairs, some prone on white-sheeted carts. The men were naked under their loose hospital gowns and some did not cover their thighs as Stuart and his father passed. His father nodded to a black man by the window who followed them with eyes and a face completely without expression.

They entered the ward, a long room with thirty beds on a side. Tables were arranged in the center aisle, and two men played checkers while a third leaned over the board. Music from a transistor radio echoed flatly along high walls which curved overhead into a wide archway, painted blue. Stuart's father stood by the entrance; he was handsome, with the strained, eager look of a man searching a gangplank for relatives. His eyes were active, his face worked elaborately around a smile. The hand holding the thermos shot into the air and Stuart followed his father to a bed on the far right.

Mr. Dobkin sat erect, white hair combed to a gentle crest across his scalp. His mild blue eyes caught light, and his expression was of small, perpetual surprise. A hollow tube projected from the middle of his throat, and through this, he breathed. He tried not to move his head.

"Mr. Dobkin," Stuart's father said. "You look wonderful."

Mr. Dobkin smiled. The bed was neatly made around him, his feet, two slopes halfway down the mattress. There were two chairs, one covered with clothing. On the cluttered night-table was a black and white photograph of a young woman whose lips had been retouched bright red. Her lips made her look like she was waiting to be kissed. Stuart's father poured coffee into the thermos top.

"We came to see you first of all, Mr. Dobkin." His father spoke loudly, animatedly, and around the room, heads looked up. Some of them smiled. "In the car on the way over, Stuart said, he said, Daddy, why don't we go see Mr. Dobkin as soon as we arrive. I believe you must be his favorite."

The boy looked at his father, then back at the man in the bed.

Mr. Dobkin raised a tissue to his throat. His voice was like a hull scraping rocks and came from somewhere in his chest. The boy could not understand what he said. His father laughed.

"Stuart? Of course. What did you think? Stuart, come say good morning to Mr. Dobkin."

Stuart tried to watch the blue eyes as he approached. On the blankets, a thin green tube coiled toward a machine behind the bed. The old man smiled. His hands felt smooth on the boy's skin, dry and fine like worked wood. They moved up the boy's arms until the elbows, where they gripped and gave him a little shake. His father laughed again. Mr. Dobkin turned his head carefully a few degrees and groped around the night-table. He brought back a round tin with a painting of a girl sitting among sheep on its cover. With delicate fingers, he twisted the lid off and held the tin out to the boy. Small crescent shaped candies lay in a dust of sugar powder. Stuart took a candy and felt its weight on his tongue.

"You spoil the boy, Mr. Dobkin." His father's voice was rich with pleasure. "You'll spoil him silly." He raised the briefcase onto the bed and sprang the snaps. "Well. What will we have today? Epic? Romance? Milton." His bright eyes ranged the wall above the bed. "Or more from Lord Alfred, yes, Mr. Dobkin?

Now folds the lily all her sweetness up
And slips into the bosom of the lake
So fold thyself, my dearest, thou, and slip
Into my bosom and be lost in me."

Stuart sat in the chair draped with the old man's clothing. He held the book on his knees and read the poetry with his eyes to the page, and he did not stop, even when Mr. Dobkin pulled the green tube to his throat and the suction machine clattered to life.

They stopped at most of the beds in the ward, then at many in the identical ward on the floor above. Stuart's father had something for every patient. He knew which ones to soothe, which to joke with. He remembered that Mrs. Dorsey's grandson was a running back on his high school team, and that Mr. Feld was inconsolable over the loss of a set of dental plates. He sat by the beds and talked about whatever they wanted. He sipped his coffee and nodded his head, and when a man with pneumonia asked to have some letters mailed, sent Stuart to the mailbox in the lobby immediately, so they would be in the early morning pickup.

When Stuart returned, his father was sitting by the bed of a man with a beard who was wiping his eyes. "This is my boy, my son, Stuart. Wordsworth is his favorite poet, too," his father said.

Stuart held the worn poetry book, the texture of the leather coming through to his fingers. He read "My Heart Leaps Up" and a section of *The Prelude* his father chose. When he had finished reading, he waited. The two men looked into the air in front of them.

In the cafeteria, a young black with an athlete's body laid his head on the table and pushed food into his mouth with a hand. When he lifted his head, there was food on his face and his eyes were closed.

Stuart's father did not eat. He bought coffee and joked with the people behind the counter. They all knew him. The woman at the cash register gave him an apple and waved at Stuart. His father took his thermos and briefcase and left the room for a minute, and when he returned, added from the thermos to the coffee in his cup.

"How's the burger?"

"O.K."

"When I was your age, I could eat a ton of burgers. Six, seven, ten burgers. They had to pull me away from the table."

Stuart took a bite to indicate he could eat another hamburger if he had to. His father held out the apple.

"Mrs. Wilson said this is for you if you've been good."

Stuart took the apple. His father leaned forward and jabbed the air over his plate with a forefinger.

"I said, Mrs. Wilson, that boy's not just good. He's lucky. And I don't mean sweepstakes lucky, I don't believe in sweepstakes luck. Luck is just rewards, I said. Rewards to the deserving. That boy, I said, is a laborer. That boy knows about pain."

He brought his hand down to the coffee and raised the cup over his face. He nodded while he drank, sloshing coffee onto the lapel of his suit. He did not wipe it off.

"Look around this room, Stuart. There's your luck. These people need what we have to give. They *need* it. You know what's out there?" Without turning, he gestured at the window. "You know? Nothing. Cold, unforgiving nothing. You be glad we're in here, with work to do. You be glad."

A man in a wheelchair was having trouble maneuvering between the tables. Stuart's father took a quick swallow from his cup and jumped up to assist. Leaning over, with his mouth to the man's ear so they could talk, he pushed the wheelchair out the door toward the elevators.

Stuart put the apple down. Mrs. Wilson smiled at him and he looked away. Outside the window, asphalt stretched down to the river wall. A boy in a denim cap was throwing rocks at beer bottles he had lined up on the wall. When he shattered one, he performed a little dance of congratulation, patting himself on the back and waving his arms in the air. Beyond him, the muscular river coiled in the light. Stuart's father returned and sat heavily in his chair.

"Ezra Williams," he said. "Cancer. Five East. Remember cowboy books, Stuart. Zane Grey."

He looked at the floor and did not speak. Stuart looked out the window, pleased to see the boy had broken his last bottle. Throwing his remaining stones randomly into the water, he skipped onto the river wall and ran out of sight.

"Will we be leaving after lunch, Dad?"

"No. Too much to do. There's Lyle Johnson on three and that Russian woman in the thoracic unit. And Mrs. Holbrook. We've missed her two weeks now."

He began rummaging inside his briefcase. Stuart's face had grown hot and he could hear the river. He dropped the hamburger on the plate and pushed it away.

"What's the matter?" his father said.

"I don't want it."

"You have to eat, Stuart. A sound body is . . ."

"You didn't."

His father looked up from his briefcase, his mouth turned into a smile. "You don't want it?" His voice was very soft. "You don't? Then don't eat it, Stuart. Don't touch it."

"I had enough," the boy said, looking away.

"You had enough."

Stuart left the trays on the aluminum cart in the corner and followed his father into the bathroom. His father turned on the faucet, straightened the boy's tie, and ran a wet comb through his hair. Stuart felt the water collect in his shirt.

Mrs. Holbrook's bed was high off the ground and she lay beneath the blankets, massive and rising into the air. Something in her disease made her swell, and Stuart had seen four orderlies move her, each lifting a part, and once a tube had snapped, trailing liquid across the sheets. He stood by the foot of the bed and felt his breath escape in tiny spurts. He could hear the river, and he looked at the corners of the room and at the wide automatic doors leading out to the hall.

His father held her hands. Her fingers were grey and pliant, and the boy watched his father caress them. He patted and soothed; his hands said he would stay with her, he would not leave, and they did not stop, even when no words were being spoken.

"Mrs. Holbrook," he said. "We can't have that. We mustn't give in to despair. Sometimes I think despair is the only death, Mrs. Holbrook."

"My Anna stopped coming. I ain't seen the babies in weeks, now. One of them had a birthday in April."

"Anna must have her reasons. You know she must have good reasons."

"She don't come at all, now. I think the doctors told her she can get something from me and give it to the babies. She's afraid to come."

She was crying. She brought her eyes around; they were wild and white and her skin was grey. When the eyes passed over Stuart, his scalp tightened and the wind flew out of him. He inhaled deeply. The smell rising off the bed hit him with every breath, and every breath was a crashing in his ears.

"Anna loves you, Mrs. Holbrook," his father said. "This is hard for her, too."

The woman in the bed nodded and tried to smile. She looked again at Stuart.

"Would you like to say hello to Stuart, now? He's been anxious to see you all day. Would you like to say hello?"

Stuart walked to the side of the bed. The woman reached out and he leaned at the shoulders. Her hands touched his arms, his neck. She pulled him gently to her broad thawing chest and held him, stroking his hair. The boy was rigid, trying to be soft. In the chair, his father smiled.

When the coughs came, Stuart closed his eyes and tried not to hear. The coughs were deep and luxuriant and tore easily through something in the woman's body. They came up in her chest to where the boy lay pressed, but her hand on his face continued, soothing, calm. He told himself to wait.

Stuart waited in the car, his father's thermos on his knees. The thermos was a cool blue metal that felt good to hold. It was a deluxe two-quart model, ordered directly from the company in Nashville, Tennessee. Stuart remembered the day it had come in the mail. His father had pulled it out of the newspaper wrapping and showed him the inside, the dark glass reflecting. More money than he could easily justify, his father had said with a smile.

Stuart slid off the front seat. Kneeling under the dashboard, he took the thermos in both hands and brought it down hard on the floor, over and over, until he felt something give way inside it. He leaned it against his father's door and sat back on the seat.

His father came across the lot to the car, briefcase swinging before him at every stride. When he opened the car door, the thermos fell to the ground and rolled, making a noise. His father put the briefcase down and gave Stuart a quick glance. The boy couldn't tell what was on his face. His father picked up the thermos, unscrewed the top, and poured. Through the brown liquid, shards glinted like bits of ice in his hand. □

DESIGN

Dawn Raffel

It was my mother who told me about the attack on Ann. The call had come late the night before, after I'd eaten my usual stack of graham crackers and gone to bed. In the morning, my mother edged into the story so cautiously that I later suspected she'd rehearsed. "I'm afraid I have some difficult news," she began, "about your sister." What I felt at first was more impatient than upset: "difficult" was old news with Ann, and as far as my mother was concerned, I knew from experience how long it could take to get to the point of the story. "Your sister was walking home from the bus stop last night," my mother said. "She was going her own way, truly minding her own business . . ."

"Actually, she saw him first while she was still on the bus," my father said. He was not interrupting my mother, who wouldn't stand for interruptions, so much as talking to himself. His voice was agitated.

"Saw *who*?"

"*Him.*" My mother glared at my father, then sighed. "All she could tell the police was that he looked lopsided and wore a ratty blue jacket. I can't say that's very helpful."

"Police? What happened?" I asked, feeling fearful for the first time.

"He followed her off at her stop and started trailing her down the street. She stopped in a drugstore, that one down the block from her apartment. She bought some Dentyne. By then she figured she'd lost him, he'd given up and it was safe to go back outside. It was only nine o'clock." Her voice took on a pleading tone, and I thought I saw her eyes fill behind her tortoise-shell glasses. "It's not as if it was one or two in the morning. It was only nine. She swears it was only nine."

"But what *happened*? Is she O.K.?"

"Nothing critical happened, thank God," my father said. "Not rape or anything."

The lowdown I eventually learned was that Ann had had her face shoved into the pavement, her glasses shattered and her knees scraped raw before her screams sent the attacker fleeing with her purse. "She will heal," my father said. "I hope."

My parents had been very concerned with what was critical and what would come to heal ever since my sister had started seeing her first psychiatrist six years earlier. Ann was now on psychiatrist number four. This one, my mother said, had described her as "iffy." Recently, he had started calling my mother long distance almost every week. I didn't know much about psychiatry, but it smelled like a ratty kind of betrayal to me. Ann was 22 years old and lived 100 miles away from us in Chicago—and besides, she was an artist. She not only deserved an inner life that was none of our business, I thought; she required it. At any rate, she *had* tried to please our parents. She had earned the college degree they wanted her to have. She had landed a job they regarded as decent and that she regarded as drudgery. According to Ann, the position of administrative assistant at the Browncow Farm Equipment Company was no kind of life for a woman with her qualifications, and I had to agree. When I imagined my sister at work, I saw her sitting at a desk constructing barns out of typing paper. Nearby, girls with names like Jolene, new arrivals to the Windy City, would sit polishing their fingernails in jewel tones.

"We're going to visit Ann," my mother announced one night about two weeks after the attack. Her voice was dangerously cheerful.

"When?" I asked. I was sitting at the kitchen table, rereading *The Great Gatsby* for an assignment. I'd most recently heard that Ann's knees were healing nicely, and that she had chosen an attractive new pair of glasses. The fact that she'd successfully discouraged us from making a family pilgrimage to her apartment seemed natural. Our visits usually consisted of my mother bringing a CARE package of canned tunafish and volunteering my father to rehang the curtains. Inevitably, we would end up having dinner at the Surf 'N' Turf Inne, where a great time was had by no one.

"Now," my mother said.

My father was already pulling on his ancient car coat, and I could see that "we" didn't include me.

"It's a little bit of an emergency, honey." My mother slipped into her imitation lamb's-wool jacket. "I know you'll be fine. We'll be back in the morning, and if you have any problems, you can dial Aunt Lucy."

I tucked a placemark into my book and closed it. "Would someone care to tell me what's going on?" I said. Then, thinking I might have more success if I chose the right words, I asked, "Is something critical happening?"

"I don't know." My father pulled out his keys. "She's depressed." He paused for a moment. "But don't worry."

Then my mother gave me a peck on the cheek and the two of them were gone. My mother's floral scent hung in the air. I sat staring at my reflection in the darkened kitchen window for a while, and I thought about calling my friend Lori, but didn't. Finally, I turned on Johnny Carson and made a bowl of red popcorn, using Ann's recipe with the paprika.

Ann and I used to make red popcorn almost every Saturday night when she was babysitting me and we were waiting for Dr. Cadaverillo to come on at one. I was supposed to be in bed by ten, and Ann always acted as if it were an enormous favor to let me stay up, but I was pretty sure the truth was that she didn't want to have to watch alone. The show's dramatic vignettes were too campy to give us the creeps, but the m.c. himself, with his sallow, bony face and rotted-out teeth, was the stuff of nightmares. Ann and I would sit mesmerized in front of the TV until we heard my parents' blue Cutlass pull into the driveway. Then the spell would be broken, and I'd have to hustle into bed at top speed and pretend to be asleep. I used to lie motionless while my mother checked me, the taste of red popcorn lingering in my mouth.

Besides the secret of Dr. Cadaverillo, Ann and I were bound by endless special projects. Ann had been the star of the James Madison Junior High School art department and she never ran out of projects that required an obedient assistant at home. She didn't really have friends her own age, but she knew she could always pry me away from whatever book I was reading and put me to work. Together, we made houses out of cardboard and tinfoil—she designed and I cut along the lines she drew, sticking Scotch-tape balls where she pointed. One winter we built an entire alpine valley, with details so perfect it seemed you could move in, if only you weren't too big. I tried to save these treasures for the day Ann became famous, but somehow, they were almost all eventually lost or destroyed in our damp basement.

On Valentine's Day each year, Ann and I always made dozens of elaborate, picture-perfect cookie hearts. Ann never received cards, and she said that the whole idea of a card exchange was pedestrian. I got into the habit of leaving the cards my classmates gave me in my desk at school, as a sort of courtesy, and I'd always hurry home to bake. We'd work for hours, and then, just as we'd be finishing the frosting stage, my mother would be sure to appear. "Who is going to eat all of these?" she would ask, lifting one or two from the piled-high platter and sucking in her stomach. "They're very pretty, but that's because you can't see what they do to your teeth." Then she'd giggle nervously. "They *are* tasty," she'd admit, lifting another, "and I know I can count on you girls to clean up."

It went without saying that I was the clean-up committee. Ann was a spiller, leaving a trail of ingredients on the floor. By the time anything came out of the oven, it was impossible to walk without sticking or crunching. I was good at mopping. Unlike my sister, I was neat and careful. I didn't have any real gifts of my own, unless you counted the precocious vocabulary that came from checking out books intended for the older grades. Such a meager claim to specialness, I reasoned, meant I couldn't afford to be moody.

"Dr. Shore thinks the attack was just the last straw," my mother says. "He even hinted she might have done something to prompt it. He always said she was 'iffy.'" She was explaining to me, as I sat at the table eating breakfast, about Ann's being checked into the psychiatric ward of a hospital in Chicago the night before. The kitchen smelled of rye toast. I thought of Ann's descriptions of bald Dr. Shore the shrink and took a swallow of juice.

"Dr. Shore called us last night and warned us that your sister was suicidal," she said, and I bit my toast. "You know, there are times when people talk about suicide because they're looking for attention, and times when they don't talk about it because they mean business. Your sister meant business."

"Can I see her?" I asked. I was worried, but I also figured Ann knew what she was doing. I could only imagine she was acting on an elaborate logic that eluded the family. They'd recently shown "Splendor in the Grass" at my school's movie night, and now I summoned up a picture of my sister looking like Natalie Wood in a crisp white hospital tunic. Surely she had something up her sleeve.

"I think it would be better if you didn't visit for a while," my mother was saying. "And I'd rather you kept this quiet. This is our little secret."

"Does Aunt Lucy know?"

"No."

"Well, what should I say if someone asks about her?"

"You will tell them that she's doing fine, that she's enjoying her job and finding it rewarding."

I didn't answer.

"Look, this is for her own good," my mother said and put a hand on my shoulder. I noticed she hadn't put on her makeup yet and her skin looked grey. "Try to understand."

"May I be excused?"

My mother nodded. I hadn't asked to be excused from a table since I was six, but at that moment the formality held a comfort I couldn't explain.

The next day after school, I went over to Lori's house where we cleaned out the refrigerator and made lists of boys we liked. We played our old game, Weird Geometry, in which we pondered various romantic configurations. My heart wasn't in it. I didn't care any more about the rumored triangle between our English teacher Miss Kellerman and the high school band leader and his wife—I had more important puzzles in mind. When I left for dinner, I thought Lori seemed relieved, and I know I was. I didn't trust myself in company; I kept swinging back and forth between a grownup's impatience with teenage trivia and a little girl's fear of being caught wearing lip gloss and a bra. I doubted that I would ever grow into the confidence that Ann had been born with, and knew I'd never have the power of someone who, for example, could ice a cake and then forbid me, at the age of eight, to lick the frosting that remained in the bowl. I remembered watching respectfully while Ann, who was then fifteen, selected a china figurine—a rosy-cheeked girl dressed in brown—and frosted it over. She had me believing this made perfect sense. She told me the doll's name was Miss Sugar Coat, and she got me to clean up afterward. Ann held the same nearly absolute power over my parents. "The secret," she'd said to me once, "is to get them worried enough."

In the weeks that followed Ann's admission to the hospital I avoided my friends, read less, and often failed to hear my teachers in class. I kept trying to reconstruct the scene of the attack in my mind, searching for some clue that would explain everything, or at least enough. But every time I tried to conjure up the face of my sister's attacker, I saw only a grinning Dr. Cadaverillo, the ratty blue jacket hanging on his emaciated frame.

Meantime, my mother placed calls to the hospital twice a day and began cooking elaborate recipes with names like spicy veal tournedos and chicken fiesta surprise. No one ate much. My father worked late, and on weekends he and my mother drove to Chicago. When they were both home, they cut wide swaths between each other. They exchanged sneaky sidelong glances, but never really met each other's eyes.

Up until then, I had taken for granted that my parents were a tight team. Ann used to refer to them as the Flying Wallendas. But where I'd always thought she was referring to the teamwork required to pull off their busy schedules—the club meetings and the parties and the evenings at the symphony—I suddenly wasn't sure. I remembered her saying something sarcastic about my mother's death-defying balancing act and my father's blind lifts—which I realized now was probably a reference to his fondness for medicine-colored liqueurs. That fondness grew as Ann's high school grades plummeted and the projects stopped cold and her black hair grew wild. He collected more and more bottles of syrupy blue and green and amber liquid, and he would sip three or four tiny glasses in the evening after dinner, licking his lips, savoring. I never saw him become clumsy or loud, but occasionally he talked to the furniture when he imagined no one saw. "I don't know," he would mutter to the upholstered living room chairs. Then he'd turn to the overfilled bookcase and say, "I don't know why she stays in her room and plays sad music. Why won't she talk to us? What's happened to my girl?"

"We can't allow this to become serious," my mother said often. She arranged for my sister to be seen by an adolescent psychiatrist who Ann said was a total idiot. Each week, Ann sat in his office and stared at the walls and refused to speak. She counted the little blue dots in the wallpaper and when we picked her up, she'd say "3016" or "3032"—unless she wasn't speaking to us either.

Ann's periodic high school silences only lasted a day or two at a time, and I was always the first one she spoke to. My parents would bribe and cajole and offer her the planet on a stick if only she would utter a few syllables, but it was me she trusted. Now I was the only one in the family who couldn't see her. Every week, I asked to go along on the weekend visit, and each time my parents said no. They said they had to bow to Ann's wishes, and Ann wasn't ready.

"Ann sends her love," my mother would say to me every Sunday night when they returned. By the third week, I was seeing only the blown-up details of my mother's face as she spoke—the cracks around her lips where her lipstick had spread, the large pores in her nose. I felt betrayed and taken for a fool.

"Did you tell Ann I sent my love too?"

"Well, of course I did."

"But I didn't. I never sent any message. I'll bet Ann never did either." My mother was surprised into silence, and I added, "We're certainly a crafty family, aren't we?"

Then I saw real pain in my mother's eyes and felt guilty.

"This isn't like you," she said.

"I'm sorry."

"I know this is hard on you."

I nodded, mainly because it was the easiest way to stop her from talking. The image of Dr. Cadaverillo arose in my mind again, but he had lost his hold on me; it seemed clear now that both he and the real-life owner of the ratty blue jacket were little more, after all, than red herrings.

Just then my father, as if misreading my mind, said, "You know what kills me? What kills me is they never found the guy that did this to us. The cops have given up."

A week later, while my parents were making the drive home from Chicago, I got a phone call from Ann. I hadn't spoken to her in a month.

"This is your sister," she said dully. "It's rotten here."

"Ann." My cheeks felt hot, as if the call were from a boy I had a crush on.

"I'm trapped and I hate it here."

"I miss you. Can't you come home?"

"Even the food is terrible," she said, then giggled. "They actually feed us lima beans. And Jell-o with those slimy pears." There was a pause.

"Ann . . . ?"

I heard her start to cry, and before I could compose myself to speak I heard a click and the dial tone. I looked up the number of the hospital, dialed, and asked to speak to my sister. I was sweating, despite my mother's insistence that girls "dampen," at worst.

"I'm sorry," the voice on the other end said. "The psychiatric unit does not accept incoming calls at this hour. Would you care to leave a message?"

I hung up. I thought of calling Aunt Lucy, whom my mother had finally confided in, but didn't. I called Dial-A-Horoscope and then the weather bureau and hung up again.

When Ann graduated from high school, my mother claimed it was "by the skin of her chin." She'd said so to Ann's face.

"I am not one of the three little pigs," my sister answered. She seemed proud of her record for truancy. That July, she had gotten a job behind the shoe rental desk at Echo Bowl. After six months, she'd agreed to go to the local college, which had an art program, and she'd gotten her own apartment and made herself scarce. We often didn't see her for months. Sometimes I would take a bus and walk by her apartment, thinking I'd run into her, but I never did.

Toward the end of her senior year, my sister called and said that one of her huge, dreamy paintings had been chosen for the college art show. We all dressed up and went to the student union for the opening. The painting, done in blue and green oils, was a cluster of phantom houses atop a vague mountain, and it cast an immediate sense of longing over me that I couldn't understand. While my parents and Ann circulated, I stayed put, identifying myself to onlookers as the artist's little sister. A sweet-looking grey-haired woman said to me, "Your sister has an unusual sense of perspective." There was something false in her voice, and yet in that moment, I was able to put my finger on my sadness. However I might try to follow, there were places—secret villages of the mind—where Ann would travel without me. I searched the room for my family and saw them talking to strangers. I walked over to the refreshment table and got some pink punch in a styrofoam cup and some little party cookies on a napkin. I ruined my appetite for dinner.

Later, when we were all eating dinner in a restaurant, my mother said to Ann, "I feel as if we're all graduating. I think the hot soup is over."

"Cooled," Ann said. She turned to me; I was cutting a piece of veal into tiny bits. "Mom has always had a way with words."

Two months later, she had moved to Chicago.

Now my mother said, "It was only a matter of time; Dr. Shore said so."

"Maybe" my father said.

I kept my vow of secrecy about Ann's present whereabouts, but stories of things she had said and done years ago kept leaking out of me during the rare times I still spent with my friends. One day, Lori and I were eating leftover cold pizza out of her refrigerator and she accused me of being more obsessed with my flaky sister than Sally Coughman was with her nauseating boyfriend Scooter. I peeled a mushroom off my slice and threw it at her in a limp gesture. "Very funny," I said.

"Disgusting." Lori wiped her sleeve. "At least Scooter isn't nutsy."

"You don't know a thing about it." My voice had come out surprisingly hard and mean. "You know, you can be a real bitch."

"Jesus." Lori set her pizza down.

"Let's just drop it."

"Whatever you say. You're the *guest*." I was too ashamed to answer and she started eating again, pretending she didn't care.

Later that night, after a dozen false starts, I asked my parents whether Ann had been so different as a kid that other people would have been alarmed. My mother waited a long time before she answered. "You know," she finally said, "I think you thought your sister had a lot more in mind than she did. Not everything she does is by choice."

"Not everything anybody does is by choice," my father said, and it occurred to me to wonder how much he regretted. I was suddenly aware that my parents had never talked about Ann's future as an artist, and now I was embarrassed to mention it.

"I guess I always thought she was special," I said.

My mother looked at my father.

"Don't worry about it," my father said.

Two weeks later, Dr. Shore decided that Ann was ready for a halfway house. My parents let me come along on the final weekend drive to the hospital. We didn't leave for Chicago until late Sunday morning and my parents still didn't know whether Ann would let me see her, but I think they'd become worried about all the time I spent alone in the house.

We drove almost the whole way in silence.

"How does she look?" I finally asked.

DEBRA HINES

CODPIECE

Protection exaggerates
All form of the vulnerable thing.
The snail is buoyed by his shell.

The sheath is larger than the sword.
The quill lends silhouette to ink.
When I ponder the codpiece now,

Tracing with the tip of my finger
The outline of its existence,
Up from the battlefield

And into the edicts of priests,
I focus on the bone ribs
Of this parapet.

Coins were hidden within.
There, wealth and reproduction
Were corralled as notion.

And as latent symbol, the codpiece
Could never remain modest.
It began as a triangle—

Then bloomed, blossomed, ballooned—
Became poofed, padded, pouting.
At once a pulpit pursued by speech,

It was a scroll unfurled by utterance.
As the mouthpiece of shy men,
Its look and feel

Passed for thought.
Fine white silks spilled forth,
Shouting love from the trunk hose to the chin.

When pumpkin breeches and pear-shaped Venetians
Came to fruition,
Stuffed with horsehair, straw and grain,

The new pants obliterated the groin.
How thoroughly did bombast
Inflate the thighs!

What lay between them
Withered to a plaint, a pity, a sigh
In the smug confessional.

"She's gained a lot of weight," my mother said. I hadn't been expecting that answer. In fact, I'd thought Ann might be dramatically wasted.

"You know," my mother said, "she's been ashamed for you to see her. She's put on close to forty pounds. She doesn't want you to see her like this."

"She's been doing pottery and ceramics in the art therapy room," my father said. "Isn't that nice?"

When we got to the hospital, I waited in the lobby while my parents went upstairs. I looked at some stuffed penguins in the gift shop. A few patients in green-paper robes walked the hallways. There were a lot of tamped-out cigarette butts on the floor.

My parents finally came back down and my father said, "She's just not up to seeing you today."

"But I want to see *her*," I said.

"She wanted you to have this." My mother handed me a ceramic plate. "She made it in art therapy." The plate had been formed in a mold and Ann had enameled green and purple over the pattern of grape leaves that formed its border. In the center, she'd written in blue enamel, "For My Sister." I turned the plate over, avoiding my mother's eyes. A nurse or aide, someone with an awkward hand, had scratched Ann's name into the underside while the clay was still soft.

I couldn't think of anything to say. In the back seat of the car, I kept turning the plate over and over in my hands. It was very pretty, but it was also the sort of thing anybody could have made in arts and crafts, even summer camp.

That night, I stayed up and ran a late-night retrospective in my head. The life works of my sister: false houses and frosted figurines; secrets that she kept locked with her in her room for days, that she'd buried in silence and under the forty pounds of fat they said she'd gained. I kept thinking about all those cigarette butts on the hospital floor, then saw them lit, glowing with the seeds of cancer. I tried to force myself to cry because I thought I should; then the tears fell and my nose ran and I really couldn't stop. My mother must have heard me. She knocked on my door and came and sat on my bed like a visitor. Finally she said, "I hope you will believe someday that I tried."

The next week, I saw my sister at the halfway house. Her face was puffy and her hair was a black cloud and she was wearing an orange terrycloth robe and slippers. She had cutout paper snowflakes on her window, which overlooked an alleyway.

"Jill," she said, and the sound of my name was startling. She looked fat and scared, and suddenly I felt such a surge of love and grief that I was rooted where I stood. We faced each other with our hands at our sides. The moment passed and I embraced my sister as if, for all her size, she might disappear on the spot. "Thank you for the plate."

"Do you like it?"

"Yes." Our voices were quiet, almost whispers.

"I picked that pattern myself," she said. "It was my choice."

"Yes." I turned then, so she couldn't see the look in my eyes. "I was hoping it was." ☐

FROM LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN'S KITCHEN

PETER LUSHING

What is your aim in cooking?—To show the ketchup the way out of the ketchup-bottle.

1. Before there is cooking there is hunger, or rather, one must know that one is hungry. How do I know I am hungry? Could I be hungry without knowing it, or, worse, believe I am hungry and not be? How do I know that you are hungry—you could say "Boy, am I famished" and not be hungry at all. If I can be wrong about you, could not I be mistaken about me? But I can not be wrong about you at all. For then I could be right about you—even if you insisted you were not hungry and that I was wrong. (How could I be right; could I say "I hear his stomach rumbling—but he does not?") Since I can not be right about you, I can not be wrong about you either. But then—how do I know that I am hungry? I could say to myself "I feel a yearning to eat—I must be hungry." But have not I felt this yearning, and not been hungry? One could also say "I have felt *a* yearning to eat and not been hungry—but not *this* yearning."

2. When beginning to cook, one might put on an apron that says "I am the Chef." But then people might think it is the apron that is the Chef.

3. Suppose one picks up a cookbook, and sees the bright, pretty-colored pictures of food on its dustjacket (or, should we say, *apparently* on its dustjacket). Is the picture part of the cookbook? The cookbook does not mention the picture. Can one say that the picture exists *apart* from the cookbook? Yes—but then one would have just a picture of food—not its recipe. (Is the picture enough to *show* how to make the food?) What would it mean to say "I don't want to open the cookbook—I only want to look at the picture of food on its dustjacket." Ask the same question, but now add: "and to eat the picture."

4. Suppose you want to do what is called "cook." Is this doing what your mother did in the kitchen? Is it what you saw the counterman doing in the luncheonette? Or is it doing something else, which the activities of your mother and the counterman *resembled*? So one can say, I never saw anybody cook, even though I saw people doing something that resembled cooking, and which I can do if I can figure out what the resemblance *is*.

5. How does one learn to cook—even from a cookbook? We can write a series of steps—call them *instructions*—on the measuring, manipulation, heating, etc., of the ingredients. But then the reader might say—yes, but how do I *cook*? For we have only given him instructions—we have not explained how to *follow* the instructions. One might say: but the instructions *show* what to do. Our reply: only to those who already know how to follow the instructions—in which case they do not need the cookbook. For those who have not cooked, we must *explain* the instructions—and then analyze the explanation, etc. So that cooking, perhaps, cannot be instructed—only how to *appear* to be a cook, as in "wear an apron, and a funny tall white hat, and move a spoon around in a bowl. . . ." Then—the reader can *resemble* a cook.

6. But what of ingredients? One cannot resemble a cook without ingredients. These must be *obtained*—a relational concept, pointing to a certain dominion exercised by the cook over the foodstuffs. But how is it possible to obtain any ingredient? Suppose we wrote "flour." Then, the reader of the cookbook could go to the store, and say "give me 'flour.'" He asks for "flour"—not *flour*. And so he can never obtain flour—only "flour." And yet our recipe called not for "flour", but *flour*. If the reader proceeds, he will not be making the dish the recipe is provided for, but, instead, *the name of the recipe*.

7. Our method is not to explain, but to give examples—recipes. Imagine we want to give the reader the recipe for Viennese Banana Soufflé. The reader perhaps will expect he must whip egg whites. In what sense does he expect this? When he reads "soufflé," is it that he *pictures* himself whipping the whites? Or, what is perhaps the same thing, does he *imagine* himself picturing himself whipping the whites? He must be careful however—he must not imagine even a speck of yolk.

8. Now it occurs in a great many cookbooks to prescribe that the egg whites be whipped by hand, using a whisk and a copper bowl. It is as if the recipe-writer assumed that the reader had a copper bowl in his kitchen—or that the reader would go to the store and purchase a copper bowl. But what if there is no copper-bowl store—*in this sense*? Then the reader would have to fashion a bowl, hammer a bowl out of copper. But that would not be *cooking*.

9. But suppose that the copper bowl is not a problem—or at least that the would-be cook *imagines* that it is not a problem. Then, the egg whites must be whipped to a certain appearance, consistency, viscosity, liquidity, peakshape, etc. In what way could a reader satisfy the recipe? Might it not be said instead that the recipe told the reader to whip the whites until

the reader was satisfied? Suppose the reader believed—in the sense that one can be said to *believe* anything—that his whites had achieved the appearance, consistency, etc., called for to satisfy the recipe. Might not this belief be all that was called for? Who would there be to say otherwise? For one could believe one had followed the recipe even if one actually had not, and be quite content—but one whose egg whites were professionally peaked, and who yet did not entertain the belief that the egg whites were "correct"—such a person would not be content. And this is so even if we all really believe that nothing exists.

10. Still, there remains the matter of the bananas. For while there may be no difference *intended* between "banana soufflé" and "soufflé made from bananas," yet the rules of the recipe would be violated by a soufflé made with no banana whatsoever.

11. The bananas would have to be mashed, perhaps in a food processor. In one sense, it would be nonsense to say "the food processor likes to mash bananas." But what if one were to try to disprove this proposition—one could imagine asking the food processor if it likes to mash bananas, holding a banana in front of the food processor to see if there is a reaction, etc.

12. Let us consider the banana that is being mashed. Does the banana feel pain? It certainly cannot be said to feel *my* pain, but I feel no pain attendant upon mashing a banana. Could the banana *imagine* that I feel a pain? Then, one can imagine the banana saying "this hurts him more than it hurts me"—but this is nonsense, because how can one compare one's private pain language with that of the banana—even if one knew the banana's private pain language.

13. The banana added to the egg whites—or, should we say, the egg whites added to the banana—but no, here A plus B assuredly does *not* equal B plus A. For one must always fold into the whites. Or is it that one folds the white into the banana. Or the cheese. Or—the *chocolate*? And what does it mean "to fold"? Is not "fold" a horizontal "stir"?

14. Having successfully performed the fold, the reader must now preheat the oven. Now, how does one *pre*heat the oven—for one can only turn the oven on, adjust the thermostat, and wait for the oven interior to attain the desired temperature. In what sense is this *pre* anything? Suppose one turned on the oven not, as supposed, after completing the folding, but before one started to execute the recipe. This, too, would be impossible, *for part of the recipe is the very heating of the oven!* So, we can say, "preheat the oven"—but it is always too late, or too early. Heating the oven before one started to cook would be foolish and useless. And heating the oven after starting would not be *pre*heating.

15. One must not check on the progress of the soufflé while it is in the oven—until it is time to test for doneness. But one does not know when doneness is attained without checking the baking in progress. Must the soufflé stay, then, in the oven forever? But then the guests would become impatient.

16. Having removed the completed soufflé from the oven, one must bring it to table carefully, else the soufflé will collapse. If, nonetheless, it *does* collapse, then in what sense has one made a *soufflé*—as opposed to a banana omelette.

17. Of that which is inedible we can say nothing. ☐

THE PARENTS

KELLY CHERRY

We bring our babies, blue-eyed babies, brown-eyed babies; we have come to watch the parade, the marching bands. Young women step high; batons fly, flash against the sky like lightning rods. Oh, spare the child, for next come the floats. See Mickey Mouse! See Donald Duck! Snow White rides in her pumpkin carriage, faster, faster, speeding toward marriage with the prince who will give her babies, blue-eyed babies, brown-eyed babies, like our own babies, who are—lost. Lost at the parade! Where are our babies, our babies? We are looking for them everywhere, frantically, everyone helping and shouting: Find the babies!—when suddenly we see them. No wonder no one could find them. They have grown three feet taller, sprouted whiskers or breasts, swapped spun sugar for Sony Walkmen. We kiss them and hug them, but we are secretly frightened by their remarkable new size. They tell us not to worry. They will take care of us. And sure enough, later, we let them drive us home, because their eyes are sharper, their hands are steadier, and they know the way, which we forget more and more often. They stroke our hair and tell us to be calm. On Saturday, our babies help us to choose the best coffin. They are embarrassed when we insist on taking it home to try it out, but they give in because they don't want to upset us. After they leave for the cinema, we climb into the coffin and pull the lid over us. The salesman had said one wouldn't be big enough, then said one would not be sanitary. We laughed: Age has shrunk us. We are small enough to fit in here quite comfortably. It is as dark as a moviehouse, the kind in which we used to neck in the back row. Now, of course, nothing is playing. The film has completely unwound, and the only sound is the flicking of the loose end, around and around. ☐

ENLARGEMENTS

SUSAN BERGMAN

If life is as big as a fish, Bob is a fish and a half. If life is bigger, Bob is too, plus a little. I met him at the swimming pool. He was testing some new waterproof instant camera equipment and would, when I stopped my laps for a breath, show me how my legs looked on film, fluttering, scissoring. A few months later he proposed to my best friend Susan underwater at a dive spot in Florida called Ginnie Springs. Inland on the bay side there's a sunken cave you enter at the Devil's eye and exit out his ear. They showed me pictures of Susan reading, WILL YOU MARRY ME? from a small slate he had hauled down with his other gear, and pictures of her writing YES. In a close-up of the two of them, kissing and slightly bleary through the water, her hair floats silkily around his beard, her white hand clasps her regulator. There was a 500-dollar fine to pay had they been caught trespassing. The state had closed the caves because of fatalities. But getting in and out was part of it. No one needs to know. You sorta slither through a narrow crack, Bob says.

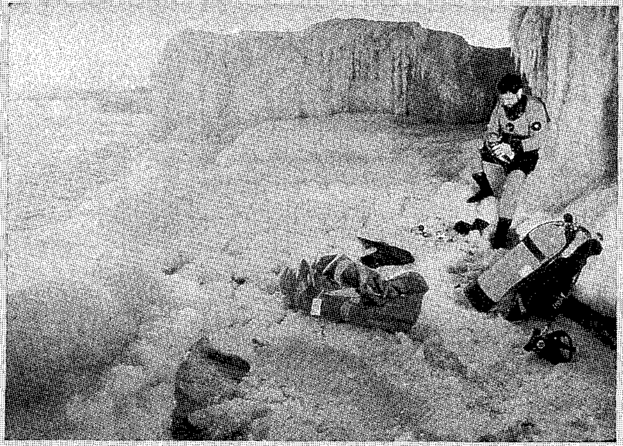
The last few winters it's been ice diving. His doctor says, one more incident of frostbite and he'll have to amputate Bob's toes. But doctors worry too much or try to worry you. It's the air temperature that's the real killer, Bob claims. Water can only be so cold: 34, 35 degrees for it to still be water, and you're in a dry suit. How dry? I want to know. He tells me the story of winter survival school the time it was 30 below zero and they made everyone chop a hole in the ice, jump into the hole with their clothes on, walk back to shore, strip, and change with the wind whipping around. That way in case anyone did fall through the ice sometime, they would have already gone through the motions in a controlled setting. The school of: the best way to learn a thing is to learn it. His thumbs went numb. He spent three minutes on the buttons and then just ripped them off. That was the coldest, then comes ice diving, he says.

We drove to a lake far enough North, deep enough into winter to suppose a certain thickness to the ice that could hold two snowmobiles, two full-sized divers, a rope tender (they needed me—Susan had to work), and a dog who sniffed around anxiously waiting for great cracks in the surface that he couldn't see but could feel starting beneath his paws and rising through him. It was the Northern split of waters in their hardened state, the creak and groan, Bob said sounded more like gunfire exploding through you, from below.

Before air tanks and tubes and masks were taken out, the sport began with chopping an opening into the tightly sealed arena of the dive. Axes, then saws. The hole was triangular, the 12-inch-thick plug wedged far enough under to assure its not slipping out to block the divers' one exit. If you knelt down to peer into the hole or to dip your hand in, you may have become convinced that water bites. You may have talked yourself into believing that anything caged becomes vicious and hateful and that even though as you see it you have just formed a triangular eye the size of a man through which the waters might collect light, the deep saw this as voyeurism on your part, an intrusion into its shame. All this in the first flash of contact with the next layer of water to freeze. It was that cold.

We shoveled away from the hole thin, spoke-like paths longer than the divers' safety ropes, radiating out, and then shoveled around from tip to tip forming a wheel; spokes to follow back to the hub if the ropes were accidently dropped, a circle of containment and light, to allow as much visibility as possible once they put the ice between them and the sun. Bob carefully double checked the hoses and gauges on their tanks. His dry suit, preinspected for leaks, made him look, well, amphibious in a colorful, thick-skinned way—a comicozie frog, belted and masked for the deep. The other guy had knotted ropes to my belt and slipped the other ends around their wrists. He reviewed with me: One tug supply line, two tugs hold steady, three tugs get me the heck out of here. I backed out of the way and pulled a blanket around my shoulders.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT McQUILKIN



It's all the wrong things, Bob told me once. In winter you're supposed to not get wet, not fall through the ice, especially not at night, not seek the cold. The sport is the inversion. He said, the moment you commit yourself to going in, the air in your suit chills, toes to torso. You drop under and your head hood sucks in water that for a few seconds feels like a party of ice picks in your face. Then you're numb and heat escaping from your head begins to warm up the water that will separate your brain from corruption. The pain is the time you need to transition between white, adamant, solid, and blue, lyrical, liquid. Sometime during the shock your vision comes back so you can look around. The silt has settled, nothing stirs in the ethereal blue except your breath escaping. If the air is warm enough outside, the bubbles you breathe out drill holes up toward the surface, like fingers warming their way out. If it's colder, the air puddles under the thick icy ceiling in gaseous pools and shimmers like mercury from a broken thermometer. The silvery pods reflect back pictures of you stretched in the center, falling away around the edges. Currents and thaws, refreezings, pock the ice's underbelly with a braille history of conditions. Yes, the effect is lunar.

I watched them descend into their torture, their choice, in their faces mixed anticipation and dread. It is the same will that enables certain victims to withstand torture, I decided, to overwhelm the nerve's cries for relief with the wail of determination. My mind finally convinced my body to do something it knew better than, Bob would say.

I lost their clear outlines, but could pick out shadowy forms. The divers, in a sort of sommersault, aimed their heads down and their feet up over their backs and by forcing extra air into their suits, air which rose to their feet, converted the bottom of my world to the top of theirs. They jumped up, which was down. They ran and flipped. They leaped between ice peaks and craters, tugging for more line. Seen from the surface, they appeared to have adopted a new gravity. By one thread they were kept from drifting out into the depths of the deep—their outer space. They had a view, I suppose, of snowmobile runners and dog's paws, the soles of my boots which to them I appeared to be dangling from.

Then there was quiet for a while, the nervous kind I used to get babysitting when the kids were safely asleep—but then again they might be suffocating. Or when the tiny figurine on the coffee table cast immense shadows on the French doors that led out to the garden. Quiet but nervous. I cranked up the TV. *Leaving the surface and swimming in further,* the divers found a skyfull of sunken ships, suspended, lost centuries ago. They climbed over the hulls, untangling their ropes as they caught on barnacles and gunwales, searching for bits of loose rigging, signs of masts, bulwarks, treasure. What would they bring me? They thought of the words *watery grave* not for the ships' crews so much as for the boats themselves, how when loaded full they used to sit half in half out of the water, carrying back and forth between ports their cargoes of grain or lumber.

When you ask Bob why he goes under the ice like this, he answers evasively, probably because he is still formulating a clever response and every time he dives he learns a better reason. Under the ice you can do all sorts of things, he says. Such as? I want to know. Fishing, for one. You take along a little bait, frozen peas or something, and these huge, slow fish half roused from dormancy come at you like the living dead. You find the one you want, the longest, dumbest looking one—you bat 'em sideways with your mitt and watch 'em roll back trying to get their balance—and put some bait on a hook at the end of a piece of string. He bites it and hand over hand you wrassle him in.

What else? Well, you can go skiing on the ice. You know it's pretty slippery under there. After falling a few times, knocking my head, I have a new respect for drunks and old ladies. Except under there you fall up, and stand back down. Standing, holding onto your line with your knees bent, three tugs and the person on the top throws the rope over their shoulder and takes off running as fast as they can. Away you go toward home. You fall you get dragged along, but that doesn't feel half as bad as the person panicking on the surface. They catch on after a few tries. It starts their blood going after sitting around waiting.

And of course, you go under the ice to get to the other side. A sort of antipodal high? I ask. Or low, he laughs.

Next week Bob's going to take some pictures in the kelp beds off the Channel Islands. He wants me to write out a few of my favorite things about Susan so that he can give them to her for her birthday, underwater, according to our tradition, he says. It'll be great. They've got a herd of friendly sea lions we've been wanting to see. And some of the reeds are over 200 feet tall, 8 inches to a foot wide, like those ripply-sided aquarium grasses, only giant. The water magnifies things, you know. Refraction? I ask. Something like that. There is a change in direction when light passes from one medium into another. Air to water. You feel yourself growing. ☐

WILLIAM VAN WERT

CROSSWORD PUZZLES

"What's a mine entrance?"

"Adit."

"An IRS accounting?"

"Audit."

"Redact?"

"Edit."

"You think you're cute, don't you?"

"I'm just answering the questions. You picked the order."

"THEY picked it. It says 'Easy' here, but some of the words seem pretty esoteric to me. Like here. A mountain range?"

"Arete."

"And a lofty nest?"

"Aerie. That's an eagle's nest. A sea eagle is an ern or erne."

"See what I mean? Nobody uses those words. Nobody knows those words, except people who do puzzles."

"Even then, I keep forgetting. For instance, the difference between adar and agar. One's a Hebrew month and the other is a culture medium. Or anti and ante. One's a poker stake and the other is opposition to."

"But there are other things. Guido's highest note?"

"Ela."

"Yes, but who is Guido?"

"That's not important."

"What was his lowest note?"

"They never ask."

"Then why do you do it?"

"Words, I guess. Not even as a language. Words as a game. There's a pleasure in knowing that an ant is an emmet or a pismire, that a harem is a seraglio or an oca, that a Siouan language is either ute or otoe. I know them, I just get to know them, and I never use that knowledge, except in the repetition of puzzles."

"You must have the feeling you've done many of them more than once."

"Déjà vu. Yes."

"Is that all?"

"My mother used to do puzzles. Every night after supper and dishes. She would disappear for thirty minutes and do puzzles. We kidded her about it. We all thought it was a waste of time. When she died, all those puzzles were lying around, undone. My two sisters and I, we began doing them. It was as though she bequeathed them, the interest in them, the ability to do them."

"Then it wasn't just a pure game?"

"No. There's no such thing as a pure game." □

WHAT MY CHILDREN THINK OF RAMBO

—I don't want you watching GHOULIES.

—Oh Dad. Why not?

—You'll have nightmares.

—No, we won't. They're just pretend. We know that.

—But you'll forget that when you're sleeping.

—Dad. Anything with a G is not real. GHOSTBUSTERS, GREMLINS, GOONIES, GHOULIES. They're all make-believe.

—Well, maybe just this once.

—It's not like we're seeing them in the dark on the big screen, Dad. Lights are on. The TV is little. We can see the VCR and know it's not real. Jamaal's parents let him see rated-R movies.

—I'm not them.

—Will you let us see 2000 MANIACS?

—No.

—BLOODSUCKING FREAKS?

—No.

—THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE?

—How do you even know the names of those films?

—They're on the commercials.

—When?

—Between cartoons.

—Maybe I'll stop you from watching the cartoons.

—You wouldn't dare.

—He's right, Dad. When I grow up I'm going to see every movie that's rated R. Maybe X too.

—Read books instead.

—We've read them all. They're boring.

—How can you say that?

—They're no good after you've read them. With movies you can see them over and over again.

—They're habit-forming.

—What does that mean?

—It means they're addictive. I wonder when books stopped being habit-forming. Okay on GHOULIES, but just this one time.

—Can we rent Rambo next time?

—Absolutely not.

—Why not? He's not real. He won't hurt us.

—That war was real. I was there. Rambo turns it into a lie.

—He's just a cartoon.

—War is never like a cartoon.

—As soon as you die, Dad, we're going to rent Rambo. □

ESCARGOTS

THOMAS E. KENNEDY

Bitter are these days of our ending.

We crawl in salt, my brothers and I, writhing here to be purified. Bitter are the sweet memories of the gardens of our youth, bitter the absence of our children who have escaped this fate, bitter that our lives should end here even as our own parents were lost to the jaws and beaks of beasts, cousins trodden to the pavement by the idle children of the mansion. The fate of our race has been cruel. How could we know our own fate would be less kind yet?

The salt lacerates, sears our eyes and lips, blinds us slowly, tans us alive, desiccating us. From edge to edge we crawl in a futile march for a freedom we shall never know again; each turn ends at a sheer, gleaming wall. We are in a box, a pit.

In the beginning, we passed the time by singing, speaking, telling stories, anything to bolster one another's spirit, certain that we would find liberty again, that we would once again know the cool green evenings of our gardens. But above the edge of this sterile metal pit, through a vast sheet of glass, I saw the red light of sunset and then a silver moon that flew in the clouds, and then a blue dawn followed by another day of searing pain that took our voices, our hope, our courage. What are we now? Doomed insects in a pit of salt. Does an aphid have claim to dignity?

With the fading of the light on the second day, as sunlight red as blood smeared across the pane of glass high above us, two glittering eyes peered down at us.

I do not know whether the others know that our movement through this burning salt serves their purpose, these savage gods who have plucked us from our garden and cast us into this glittering pit. I have heard of this, this slow death they serve us to purify us for their mouths, and that we ourselves participate in the process of this *cleansing*, as they view it. My brother Balthus, dead already, lies in the corner curled in the final knot of his last agony.

He said that he would not cooperate in his own degradation, would not drag himself through salt to burn away that which to us is life, to them *slime*. A futile gesture, poor Balthus: what did it profit you? I do not know. I know nothing any more. I only know that to sit still here is a hell beyond imagining; even if to move gives no respite, it is at least a gesture of escape, of will.

They must see this, the gleaming eyes that peer down upon us must see our agony as they measure our progress toward their fires. The great fires, at least, it is said, we shall be spared. We will be dead by then, cured of our life fluids which are so distasteful to them, purified for their filthy decadent tongues.

They *must* be aware of our agony. They *must* be. I do not know.

I watch my brother, Joseph, dying; Joseph whose shell had been our joy with its great multi-colored whorls that glistened with dew in the morning sunlight of our days. I see my beloved mate, Esther, nearly gone now, without strength left to crawl from this inescapable torment. How lovely she was a mere three dawns ago; to see her sunning at the garden wall, her sleek, trim body stretched to its full beneath the elegant casing of her shell—the very shell from which their barbarous lips will sip the steaming, spiced juices in which our corpses are fried. As I drag my body past her now, she gazes back at me, parts her blistered lips, but cannot speak. I pause to offer what comfort I can muster from within the shell of my own torment.

We both watch as Joseph—the once fearless, brazen Joseph who defied the beaks of birds for sport—crawls past, weeping, broken, moaning for an end.

Esther's eyes convey the question which her scorched lips cannot shape: *Why? Why, my husband? Why has this befallen us? What purpose does it achieve? What could it profit the universe to require this of us?*

I shake my head, gaze into her lovely eyes, scarred now, half blind. *Dear woman, my lovely dear Esther: I do not know. There is nothing for us to do but trust, be thankful that our own little ones had cunning enough to hide within the leaves and vines, to know that they shall have days of green life for themselves and for their own. There is nothing left for us here but faith, nothing, no fight, not even to curse these savage gods.* □

HONORING THE MAYOR

WAYNE UDE

The day of the Mayor's funeral dawned clear and bright, brighter than any day we'd seen since the reprocessing plant and the refinery began operations, brighter than any day all the way back to before the brewery opened. The Mayor had been in Arizona, down outside Phoenix, where he'd retired on the money from land investments begun when he was only City Planner. There, his letters had said, he especially enjoyed the bright, cloudless sky, the heat on his old bones, the endless summer—especially during our winters, which are deservedly notorious now, and so a point of pride with us. But death had come to him, even in Phoenix, and we had managed, afterwards, to bring his body back for one last honor.

It had been a beautiful ceremony: first the procession from the funeral home where he'd been disemboweled and embalmed, in accordance with state law (unnecessary, perhaps, since he was to be cremated, but laws are laws, and our morticians are an important part of the economy); then a moving memorial service at the Church of the Victorious Pharisee (where he'd been enrolled at birth, as are all investors, bankers, entrepreneurs and lawyers in our community); finally a stately, dignified procession back to the funeral home for the cremation.

Our honoring of him did not end there: after the cremation, the current mayor, the chief of police, and the head of the chamber of commerce went up in one of our new police helicopters to scatter his ashes over our city. Most of us came outdoors when we heard the rotors above and stood bare-headed, hoping to be touched one last time by this man's essence before he finally departed from us.

The sky was clear! The industries he'd brought to town (located, of course, on land he owned) had all shut down for the day in his honor, and so the brewery to the north, the refinery to the west, and the reprocessing plant to the east were silent. We could clearly see the helicopter as it hovered; a door slid open, and then we could even see the ashes as they spread out in the breeze caused by the rotor blades.

Indeed, there were more ashes than we had expected: they fanned out beneath the helicopter in a growing cloud, obscuring it, finally hiding it from our sight; and still they continued to spread across the sky before reaching us below.

For a moment, before the sky turned completely black, some thought the industries had started up, adding their layers of smoke and ash to the Mayor's, and so, by mingling something of their essence with his, perhaps gaining for themselves a special blessing. Perhaps, even, each had expanded in secret, planned the introduction and announcement of that expansion to coincide with this ceremony in honor of the man who, more than any other, had been responsible for their—and our—prosperity. But a glimpse beyond the edges of the Mayor's ash cloud showed all three factories standing like silent sentinels around our homes, the air over them still clear and bright as the ash cloud grew outward.

Then the ashes began to reach us: a dense choking swarm, smelling like our air on the most productive of days: a combination of rotting grain, hot tar, and an accident in a high school chemistry lab, or, as we say, the smell of money being made. Each ash seemed to have grown as it fell; some were as much as a foot across. And then there were the bone fragments: none of our city officials had realized that the Mayor's bones would not be completely consumed by the crematory fire, that fragments would remain. Nor did they expect such large fragments.

Six of our people were killed outright, though no leading citizens were among them, and another twenty injured. Worse, property was damaged: roofs, autos, business signs. That distracted us for a while from the cloud, and by the time we looked up again it covered our city, as nearly as we could tell, from horizon to horizon. Those who dodged falling bone fragments and the ever-larger ashes to make their way to our city's edges say the cloud covers the factories, too, and extends a mile beyond.

The mayor's ashes, and fragments of his bones, have fallen for three days now, while our civic leaders counsel us to wait for a wind to come up. Our factories have not been allowed to reopen, or to run their furnaces beyond the minimal level needed for maintenance. In our yards, the mayor's ashes grow and grow. The town's radical fringe—the no-growth lunatics, as we call them—say the Mayor has been no different in death than he was in life; but here no one pays attention to lunacy. □

TOTEMS

TREBBE JOHNSON

Several years ago a totem vision appeared to me in Central Park. It happened on a January afternoon, when the frozen snow, trampled to a sheen like threadbare cloth, was brushed with mist. Silence resounded. Trees, lampposts and park benches were gray, barely discernible symbols of a once solid landscape. The few people I passed looked transient and secretive. I was in despair. I was breaking up with the man I loved, and for two weeks I'd been walking the streets of New York City in search of an apartment. Now, after yet another fruitless day, I was on my way back home. Or, rather, to the place that used to be home. I didn't think I'd ever feel warm and safe again.

Then I saw the rock. It was a low outcrop of Manhattan schist, a black and massive hulk gleaming with mica, feldspar, quartz and time. On a greener, sunnier day, children might have leapt and climbed over it, squirrels might have scampered across it, or a contemplative person might have nestled into one of its shallow niches with a book. But on this winter afternoon it was so formidably on its own that I stopped still and stared.

Right before my eyes that rock remained and remained and yet remained. It had a place on earth, securely held it. Such, you could say, is the way of rocks. But this particular rock filled me, at that particular moment, with joy. I simply could not get over the way it went about the business of being where it was while everything in my own life was going awry.

By the time I moved on, I'd been transformed. Calmed. Distanced from my preoccupations. I didn't find an apartment that day, or the next day either, but whenever I thought of the rock, my totem in a time of need, it just didn't matter so much.

It was in a college anthropology course that I first heard of totems. The year was 1969 or '70. I believed in peace and revolution, getting back to the land and doing your own thing. For insights I looked to the myths and religions of many peoples—the more remote the more credible—from Zen Buddhists to Romanian gypsies to Hopi Indians. Naturally the notion of a guardian spirit, an animal or plant whose essence would enter and empower me, held great fascination. I wanted a totem of my own, so I chose the fox. Fox was secretive, a loner, a prowler at night, and besides, like me, it had red hair.

But in truth people do not choose their totems, they're chosen by them. Ruth Benedict, whose *Patterns of Culture* we read in class, described how many of these singular partnerships were formed. In some North American Indian tribes, the totem vision was the climax of an adolescent's rite of passage into adulthood. In others it was the divine response to one person's meditation on a certain problem. Almost always this very personal communication between spirit and human came as the result of a patient quest.

A man or woman would strike out alone toward forest, field or mountaintop, and then, steadied by patience, emboldened by faith, sit down and wait. The visitation, whether by bear or hummingbird, salmon, oak or star, occurred when and how the spirit deemed fit. It could happen in moments or after days. It could be manifested in a dream or in the very palpable pressure of a cool wet snout against a wrist. All that mattered in the long run was the moment of recognition when the presence arrived. I imagined it as a skin-prickling, chilling, and electrifying sensation that would ring through every vein: *Yes! Yes! I greet you and I honor you!*

In the instant of communion an exchange was made. The spirit became an ally to the human; the human, in return, offered homage, protection and tributes to the spirit and its kind.

Consider the implications of such a partnership. You're alone at night. You're lost in the woods or lost in thought. You're tensed for a battle or petrified by some power you can't subdue. But you're not alone. You can call forth your totem, your guardian spirit, and it will come to boost your courage and urge you forward. We could all use a totem to see us through.

A few years after I left college I moved to the country, and there I discovered that I could have totems of infinite variety. All I had to do was go outside and concentrate on any landscape. Inevitably, like an exclamation mark at the end of a spell of quiet waiting, a vision would appear. A clump of wild white roses blazed in moonlight. A Canada goose dispersed the clouds in a pond. The curve of a hill ennobled an August sky. All these visions were manifestations of the earth's divinity, and I felt chosen because I had witnessed them. After the moments had passed, I would recall them often with awe and gratitude, and so they became my allies, my personal totems.

Then I moved to the city. I figured that was the end of any communication with guardian spirits. There are no animals in the city, after all, and hardly any plants. There are no stars to speak of. Sidewalks, cars, buildings, crowds: this is the fabric of the city. After a while my totem-watching eyes grew astigmatized. I found myself accepting the view held by many metropolitans that all phenomena are the products of human expertise. With an outlook like that you can mistake a rainbow for clever advertising if you're not careful. Besides, the city is a place of such haste and intention that it simply does not occur to the average person to *choose* to wait.

Once I witnessed that rock in Central Park, however, I changed my mind. I discovered that there are totems aplenty in the city; it's just that it's easy to miss them because they've adapted so well to their environment. Like city people, they've toughened and camouflaged themselves in order to survive. But, in their crazy, magnificent, stubborn way, they are irrefutable reminders that the natural world will have its way in the world, no matter how we humans might interfere.

On hectic afternoons, for instance, I have seen summer clouds drift through the mirrored windows of some important skyscraper. I have seen the wings of pigeons cut silver hieroglyphics in the morning sun. I have seen a sunset enchant a network of fire escapes up and down an ordinary city block. And just the other day my husband and I watched a spectacle at the window of our Brooklyn apartment: a tendril of grape ivy groped through air to curl round a stalk of philodendron, and in the moment of contact there was an awesome rustling and trembling of green.

These visions are emissaries of the earth just as surely as antelope or polar bears. I exist, they exist, and for one exhilarating instant we exist together. In these moments of recognition I feel myself drawn out of myself. My focus, like an arrowhead, is shot with a resonant *ping* into something Other. Something that will exist with or without me and that does me honor by revealing itself in my presence.

In times of need I can evoke these totems for a reminder that my own difficulties are neither eternal nor central to the spin and flow of the universe. Or, better still, I can send my senses off on another vision quest. For the miracles are endless and they will always appear anew. And then the thrill will rush in my veins: *Yes! Yes! I greet you and I honor you!* □

ED

Elizabeth Collison

It is summer in this little town and my friend Alicia says we are all feeling it, we are all a little verdant and steamy here. Alicia is right, I think. It happens every year, no one is surprised, though we do spend such long winters in our down and our cableknit that sometimes by March a few of us lose hope.

Still, now it is July and near ninety some days and there is no denying it is summer. Mornings begin clear, soft, there are breezes. The grass is long and very green and wet against our ankles. Afternoons the water rises from these lawns, from our day lilies, the beech. Steam rises to meet steam, to hang heavy in the oaks that line the streets of this town. We become muted, heavy, tropical. Balsam and lobelia tumble from moss baskets. And it is fertile. We are the river banks of the Nile here, we are the delta, rich and fecund. It is, Alicia says, an awful time to be single.

I myself try not to think of it of course. I try only to count a few blessings. My friends and I are healthy, we are employed, we are none of us mentally impaired. Still I am 39 this summer and the fact remains that I am single—something I have always been, though I do find myself in summers in this little town more single than usual. I stay, however, because I teach at the high school here. They are good to me, they have renewed my contract. I cannot leave just because of the summers.

So I am on vacation now, though this is not normal. Normally in summers I take a course, I drive 30 miles round trip to a university, I keep my certificate current. But this May I change my mind, I decide I have had enough of college credit. For once, I think, I will get a tan, I will walk around in shorts and I will throw out all my stockings.

It is a mistake, this decision to stay home, I know it the first week. I live in a small townhouse, there are two floors, I have my own entrance. Still there is no yard, there is only asphalt for parking. And though I try, though I take a beach towel out to my parking stall, I lie for an hour every afternoon, nevertheless in one week I know. It is not possible, I cannot tan myself on asphalt all summer.

The fact is, I have time on my hands. And I should be thankful then, I think, that this June there is Ed. So again I try. I try to count Ed in my blessings.

Ed is 28, he is very tall and has a malocclusion. It is what I notice about him first, his long jaw, how it makes him look always so sad. Ed wears mostly bermudas, mostly plaid, it is the second thing I notice. And he is always in black socks and always the same canvas shoes, they are his yard shoes I know, but still I think he does not have to wear them with black socks.

Ed and I meet in the community garden in this town. We have plots next to each other, it is inevitable we should meet, though actually I am only filling in here. I do not really belong in this garden. I am only watering a plot for my friend Alicia.

The garden is a beautiful place, there are willows nearby, a fountain, benches, and once you have a plot in this garden, you can keep it the next year. Most people here know each other, they call to each other, I have heard them trading eggplant for kohlrabi. And Alicia does not want to give up her land here, there is a waiting list, if she does not garden this summer they will give her place to someone else. Still, Alicia has had this same plot for five years now, and she has tired, she says, of so much mud on her shoes every summer. So she has given me her place for June. It is forbidden, but the others will not object, Alicia says, if it is only for June.

I should tell Alicia no, I should tell her to find someone else to run her sprinkler. I agree, however, because as I have said, this summer I have time. But I have come late to this garden, I was not here for the planting, I don't know all the rules. And so I am an outsider here, the others do not call to me from their plots, they do not offer to trade me their kohlrabi.

I am glad then when one evening Ed says hello. Ed has the plot to the north. He comes here generally in the evenings, when I do, and now off and on for two weeks, we talk. We turn on the sprinklers, and over the sound of the water Ed tells me about himself.

I learn a lot about Ed this June. I do already know about his shop, of course, Ed's Body Shop, I have read his name on a sign outside of town. But I learn more. I learn Ed moved here just last year and this is his first summer in the garden, too. There was an opening, he was lucky, he said, so he got in.

Ed rents a room in a house now, only $65 a month, kitchen privileges, though the house doesn't have much of a yard. It's why he's here, he says, because the room doesn't come with a garden. The woman who owns the house is named Inez, she is 85 years old and Ed says he gets the room so cheap because Inez doesn't have to charge much, she doesn't need the money, mostly she's just renting the room so she'll have company, she'll have somebody there at night.

Inez is a little funny, Ed says. She asks him sometimes if he hasn't just heard something. What did it sound like, Ed always says, but then Inez is never certain, she's just checking, Ed guesses, she just wants to make sure she hasn't missed anything. Ed worries about Inez, she isn't very well he thinks. So he brings her things from the garden and she seems pleased when he does. He tries now to take home some spinach for her each night. Soon, Ed says, there will be zucchini, maybe some tomatoes, and he just hopes Inez holds on till then, it would be a shame, he says, if she had to go to a home before the tomatoes were in season.

Ed tells me all this the first evening. He tells me because I ask. That is, first Ed says hello and he tells me his name. Ed, he says and offers his hand. So Margaret, I say, and we shake and it is a little odd then, our standing there shaking hands as though we have just agreed on something. I say finally well so and what brings you to the garden, Ed, though I am not so much interested. I am only making conversation because I do not want to go on standing here with Ed, nodding and shaking hands. I have not meant to pry. But Ed doesn't seem to mind, he tells me how he's single, he just thought maybe he'd meet some people in this garden. And then he tells me some other things.

Now this is something I have noticed myself about being single. You often tell people too much, once you get started, you cannot always stop. It is because generally you have no one much to talk to. There is no one when you come home after work and put down your lunch bag on the kitchen table, there is no one that says so how was your day. It makes you save up the stories, sometimes you practice them, you say them over to yourself at night until you get them the way you want. And when you do see someone then, you cannot always help yourself. You tell people things when they have not even asked.

So Ed tells me how he has this body shop, how when he moved here last spring, he bought the shop and last summer he had an open house. He put up a volley ball net in the back and he had a cake there too and balloons but then, Ed says, nobody came.

I don't know what to say here, I think I should say something but Ed just shrugs like it's o.k., it happens. Still, I feel bad, I think Ed really did want people to come, I think how he must have swept up the place, how he probably put fresh sand on the spots in his floor where oil had leaked.

We don't talk much more that evening. And we only say hello the next night, but then the following day Ed sends me a letter. It is a memo actually, two sheets of paper with carbon in between so you can write back and keep one copy yourself for your files. The memo has Ed's Body Shop printed across the top and below this it just asks would I like to have coffee sometime.

I am surprised, I have never gotten a memo before, I'm not sure what to do with the second copy. I don't know why Ed is even writing in the first place. But I think about it.

What I think is that it is kind of sad, a memo like this from someone I have just met. But then I also think how I do not at all want to go for coffee, I do not want to sit and watch Ed fool with the sugar packets on some cafeteria counter. And so that evening when I see Ed at the garden, I make up an excuse. I thank him for the memo but I say how I have these other commitments, I am sorry. Ed just says well so maybe some other time. It's o.k.

I don't see Ed for awhile after that. He doesn't come to the garden and I think maybe he is hurt, I think maybe I will not hear from him again. But then in a couple of days I get another memo. Would I like to see a movie, Ed wants to know. Would I like to take a drive around a lake?

I don't write back, I don't see Ed at the garden, and in two more days Ed writes again. He's been thinking and do I maybe need him to fix something on my car? He has this body shop, and well no charge for the labor, just parts. P.S. Only kidding about the parts.

I do not like all these memos, I think, and I decide I will tell Ed that when I see him. And then I will tell him about the address, it is maybe what bothers me most. Three memos now and Ed has gotten the address all wrong. I live on Woodland Park Lane and each time now Ed has written the memo Woodlane Park Place. It makes me angry with Ed, that he cannot seem to get the address right.

So the next night when I see Ed at the garden, I thank him for the memos, I correct him on the address, and then

I say how he doesn't need to write, he can just see me at the garden. You should save your memos, Ed, I say. But Ed only tells me not to worry, he can use as many memos as he wants, he has them printed by the box and he gets a good deal, he says, since he only uses one color ink.

The next day then I get another memo. This one just has a clipping stapled to it, a photograph Ed has cut from the Wednesday night paper. It is a picture of an old man with no teeth sitting on an iron cot, grinning and holding a white duck in his arms. I do not know why Ed has sent it to me. But I worry now. I worry Ed wants to be my boyfriend. I don't know why else he would send me memos.

I tell Alicia about Ed. Alicia, I say after the last memo, what should I do? Alicia is my friend. I want to know what does she think, four memos in one week.

Alicia is sitting on a newspaper on my kitchen floor painting her toenails mauve, very big, she says, for summer, and I can tell she is not interested in stopping in the middle of the first coat. Still, Alicia thinks about it, she thinks about Ed. And she is willing to give him a second chance then, I guess, because she tells me to write back. Save the carbon, Alicia says. Your grandchildren will have a good laugh.

Now here is the difference between Alicia and me. Alicia still assumes there will be grandchildren. Alicia is as old as I, she is as single, as childless. But Alicia assumes things for us both. Anything is possible, she says, you don't know. And so Alicia grows her hair long, she curls the ends, she wears soft eyelet dresses in the summer. It is not right, I think, for a woman of 39 to be so optimistic. Still, just yesterday Alicia bought a garter belt and lilac-colored stockings. Something may come of it, she says. You don't know.

But I do. I know. And though I don't think we have anything to discuss, I say but these memos, Alicia, they are just random, and I describe the old man holding the duck. What am I supposed to make of it, Alicia, I say. And then I tell her I don't think I can go back to the garden. But Alicia is firm. She reminds me there is still one week left in June. I have, after all, agreed to the whole month.

The next evening, then, I am back, Ed is too, so I turn on the water and I thank him for the new memo. Ed doesn't seem to hear, though, he is sitting on the ground next to where he has planted a new row of basil, and he is pulling at some weeds like his mind isn't on his work. And so Ed, I say, is something wrong, and I turn off the sprinkler and I say here, Ed, let's talk.

Ed doesn't look up, he just says how it's this garden, Margaret. What's the point?

I say I am not sure what he means, and so Ed sighs, he keeps weeding, he doesn't look at me. But finally he says how well it's not easy to explain. I come out here, Margaret, he says, I plant things, I water, I take home spinach to Inez, I plant a second crop. But what's the point, Margaret? I only take home a little spinach to Inez.

And here Ed stops, he looks up, he tells me it is very difficult, Margaret, you know. And I realize Ed means being single, it is very difficult being single. Ed is telling me this because he thinks I will understand.

And so Ed, Ed, I say, you are 28, there is still time for you. And I say how maybe he just needs to get away. Maybe you just need a vacation, Ed. It would do you good, I say, to go visit a national park.

But Ed just looks sad and shakes his head. And then he puts his head down on top of the row of new basil and says something into the ground so that I can't hear him. I know for sure then we should talk, Ed and I. But I do not know what to do, I do not think I can carry on a conversation like this if Ed is going to sit with his head on the basil. So I just say Ed, do you need help?

Ed doesn't say anything for awhile, though finally he lifts his head. But he is large-eyed and gulping and I know we will not talk. I know Ed cannot for the life of him make a single sound.

Still, we make it through that last week, Ed and I. There are no more scenes and Ed only tells me about his shop again. He tells me how he's planning an open house, he had one last year, he says, but nobody came. I say yes, Ed, I know. And I say how this year it will be better. I'm sure of it, I tell Ed.

Then finally it is July and I stop coming to the garden and I don't see Ed again. I do hear from him once or twice, though, Ed has the address right now and he sends me one more memo, it is a flyer actually, about the open house. I don't go and a week later Ed sends me a postcard from a natural hot springs. He doesn't ask where I've been.

So I decide that is that and I don't think about Ed so much, though once in awhile I think about the garden. I miss the cool evenings there. But now it is only hot, and in the afternoons I go back to sunning myself, I leave my townhouse, I take my beach towel to my parking stall again, I lie on my back on the asphalt, and sometimes I wonder about the garden. I close my eyes to the sun and I think how at this same moment in the black soil of that garden hundreds of new potatoes grow, small and silent inside their smooth skins.

But then another two weeks go by, and it is late July. I no longer go out to the asphalt, I do not think about the garden, and there are no letters from Ed. So it is a surprise when one night, it is a Friday and very hot and I am in the living room of my townhouse listening to the radio with all the windows open wide, there is Ed at the screen door.

Hello Margaret, he says through the screen.

Well Ed, I say, and I sound as though I am glad to see him. This surprises me too a little. But I think it is true, I am glad to see Ed. So I say come in, Ed. I turn down the radio and I ask him does he want an iced tea?

Ed stays behind the screen door, he does not seem interested in iced tea, he just stands with his arms down at his sides and he says well Margaret, you see it's like this. And then still standing there he says how for a year now he has been living in one room of a house that an old woman of 85 owns. And I say yes, Ed, you have told me this. The woman's name is Inez, you have already told me all this.

And Ed says well but you don't know what it's like living with an 85 year old woman. She has this smell to her, Margaret, he says, like chicken when you keep it too long in the refrigerator.

I say yes, Ed, I have known people like that. And I say now don't you want to come in?

EDWARD KLEINSCHMIDT

KATZENJAMMER

A Kleinschmidt is not a Blacksmith.
The former has only pounded tennis balls
With a tennis racket and quietly,
On grass courts, only the rhythmic
Plop plop, as if he were thumping his
Chest underwater. Most of the real blacksmiths
Have died, now that we are in the 20th
Century, and they've taken some of their loud
Sounds with them. They bent horseshoes—like
I have bent this line. They hammered
Out hot metal and I have written
The words that say so. While I am doing
This in private, it's true my
Desk is a kind of anvil. I think
Of Hephaestus before his forge, fanning
Flames, bellowing, and how he would
Hobble home to light the fire in
Aphrodite's stove. He was a quiet
Man and listened only to the ringing
In his ears. There are now more
Smiths than any other English name.
They have made some noise. They
Have cut and pounded out a place.
John and Mary Smiths shout at each
Other, strike the hot iron and
Sizzle in a tub of cold water.
That chestnut tree that once had
Spread is dead, too. There is a subdivision
There now, with commuters, and the noise
They make all day is what I have to listen to.

It is making me uncomfortable, talking to Ed through the screen door. But Ed just says no, you don't know, Margaret. You don't know how it is. It's real hot in that house, Margaret. Inez keeps the windows closed all day and sometimes I think I can't go back there, not with the smell and the heat.

Ed, I say and I get up and I open the door. I have had enough of Ed standing there behind the screen. But then I see Ed looks terrible, his face is longer than I remember, he looks very tired and it worries me so I say here, Ed, you sit here and I will go find us a couple of beers.

I bring back two bottles, the beer is very cold and it seems to lift Ed's spirits some. So we sit on my couch and we drink our beers and Ed tells me a little more about Inez, how she has failed a lot these last few weeks.

She gets these ideas sometimes, Margaret, he says. Last week she told me she didn't want to see my shoes around all the time, I was leaving my shoes lying around the living room and it was beginning to bother her. But I don't know where she gets that, Margaret. I'm a tidy man, I keep my shoes in a row in my closet. It worries me, Ed says.

And I say to Ed well yes, it would worry me too. It's natural enough you should be concerned. It isn't healthy, I say, coming home every night to someone who's imagining men's shoes.

I am only trying to help here but I'm not sure Ed has heard because he is on a new topic now, he says how she's started talking to something in her dining room this past week. He doesn't know what it is, he says, but she talks out loud almost all the time now to it and she won't leave the dining room. She tells him she must stay and entertain. There is, she must think, some kind of party always going on.

So you see, Margaret, Ed says, I can't go back there just now. Inez sits up all night and she talks to it, if I go back there now she'll want me to have a talk with it too.

Ed does not then wish to discuss Inez anymore. He is tired of Inez, I can tell, he now just seems to want to sit on my couch. But he is so quiet, he looks so sad again that I am afraid it will be like the time in the garden by the basil. So finally I just say look, Ed, would you like to spend the night?

It is getting late, I do not want just to go on sitting here with Ed. So it would be all right, I say. I would like you to stay, Ed. I mean, of course, only that he can spend the night on my couch, it is important that Ed understand this. I look at him to see what he is thinking.

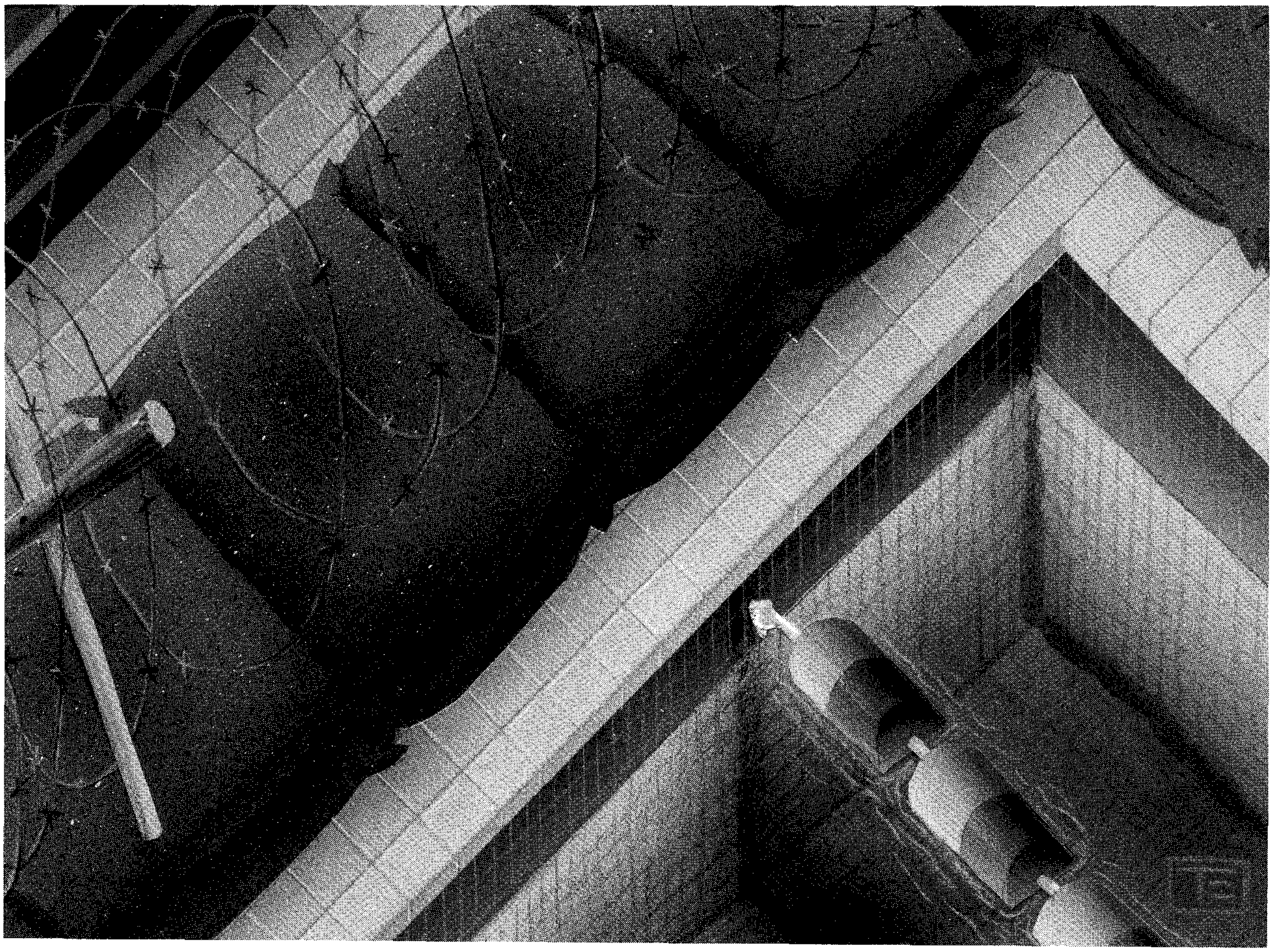
Ed doesn't say anything, he just stares at his beer. But I know he will stay. He doesn't look like he has plans for going anywhere else.

And this is how it is then.

Ed is lying on my couch, it is late and I am upstairs, I am in my own bed with the sheets rolled down and I listen to Ed breathe. It is slow and deep and loud below me. So I think about Ed lying there. And I imagine him twitching once, it travels down his whole body and shakes the couch. Then Ed yawns and I think of him stretching his legs the length of my couch, I think how his feet hang over the end, that they are hairless and long-toed and very white. And then I know Ed is asleep, the breathing is deeper, not so loud, and it will be all right, I think, it will be all right.

I lie still and I feel there is a breeze, the day's heat is beginning to lift. There is also a moon, mostly full, and I think of the garden again, how each day now in the thick circles of squash leaves the blossoms have begun, how they are fat and very yellow against the green.

I hear Ed sigh in his sleep. He turns and the couch creaks and I know then I am falling asleep too because I only think how nice it is, having someone else here breathing all night long in my house. And maybe tomorrow, I think, I will tell Ed that. I will get up early, I will make Ed breakfast, and we will sit at my kitchen table and drink our coffee until noon. □



KILLER BUTTERFLY

David Hellerstein

It all begins outside Amy Joy Donuts, where I'm getting a snack before practice. Backing out, a french cruller in my mouth, milk carton in hand, I bang into Joey Rubino's white Trans Am. There's no damage, but Rubino gets out and pounds my hood, screaming *motherfucker, motherfucker.* I ease forward into his knees—he smacks to the ground. Then he's at my side window, bashing it with his elbow. I'll tell you, I lay rubber right out of that lot. His Trans Am roars after me, trying to rear-end me all the way down Ridge Road to the pool. Really, the guy's a psycho.

So I tear into the locker room and strip and jump into my Speedo and grab my goggles and run out the cold entryway, hopping through the icy water of the footbath to the pool where Coach Lindstrom has everyone lined up waiting in the booming blue silence.

"What's going on?" he says. "My butterflies don't have to be punctual?"

"Had a slight car accident," I commence to say.

"I don't care what the crap you had," says Lindstrom. "Where's Rubino?"

"He's coming."

He saunters in three seconds later, wearing his two Speedos, clutching his black-rimmed goggles in his fat hand; he stands next to me on line, giving me a quick elbow in the liver when Lindstrom turns to start calisthenics. We stretch, bend, stand on squeaky piles of kickboards to loosen our hams, we pull knotted rubber tubing. Rubino snaps his at me.

"Cut it out!" I snap him back in the thigh.

Lindstrom whirls. "What's going on?"

"Nothing," I say, balling the rubber tube in my fist, "sir." We're obliged to call teachers 'sir' at Country Day, and even though Coach Lindstrom isn't a teacher he luxuriates in 'sir.' Coach is a middle-sized, thirty-fivish, fog-colored guy with a receding hairline and pocked cheeks, and he's the best coach in the state. We're ranked second this year, up from fourteenth last year, and that's on account of Coach. But he can be a royal pain.

"Drop that tubing," Lindstrom says. I drop. "Now listen close, Zant. No excuses. You get here on time and you keep your mouth sealed. You got that, peckerwood?"

"Yes, sir," I say.

"You're only number two butterfly, Zant," he says. "We can win without you, remember that."

"Yes, sir," I say. Everyone else is snickering their hemorrhoids out, but I just invulnerabilize myself to it, until Coach turns his harangue to today's workout:

"Four hundred free warmup, twelve one-hundreds at one minute ten, ten fifties kick, ten fifties pull . . ."

If he conveniently hasn't said anything to Rubino it might have something to do with the fact that Rubino holds the school record in the 100 Fly.

"All right! Into the water!"

We goggle up and dive in. We pound along freestyle, thirty of us in six lanes, counterclockwise rotations, flip-turning at the ends of the pool, coming off with perfect glides, churning through the cornflower-blue water. Really it is beautiful swimming, the way you slide along and kick and pull and breathe every third stroke into a trough of water that follows your head like the wake of a boat and the incredible rhythm and the breathless red burning in your lungs after a dozen or so lengths and I'm really getting into it today despite the half-chewed cruller dough in my belly when I suddenly come out of a turn directly into Joey Rubino's fist.

It stops me dead in the water, and for a moment I can't breathe or stroke or do anything but gag, and in that moment Joey Rubino's body passes me on the turn and goes gliding ahead. By the time I get the water out of my lungs and my legs and arms moving again he's a half-length ahead. I churn to catch up.

I neglected to mention that I share a lane with Joey Rubino. Me and Joey and Adam Feffer and Tom Wonder are the butterflies on Country Day's team, and we all share a lane. It's part of Coach Lindstrom's philosophy: one lane one stroke.

Rubino tries to ace me again on the next turn, and the next, and then I've had it: before the fifteenth turn I come up behind, and ball up my fists, and when he rises out of the turn I let him have it right in the face.

I flipturn out only a third of a body behind him. My hands are numb bags of bone chips, but I powerkick and just forget about breathing, and race Rubino side by side down the lane, sidling him against the whiffled lane dividers as we head toward the black cross. Lungs bursting, I touch him out.

"All right!" calls Coach Lindstrom. "Enough warmup."

I spit water at Rubino's back. All thirty of us, panting, hold onto the wall at the deep end. Rubino is draped over the lane divider; when he turns around I see his nose is bleeding.

"Intervals!"

The whistle blows. And we're off, the four of us in Lane 3 butterflying down the pool. Kick-kick stroke, kick-kick stroke. This is the killer: arms thrashing, crashing across each other even when you're trying to avoid collision. But forget it if someone's gunning for you.

In the shower, later, Murph McMann comes over to me. Murph McMann is our AAU Freestyle Champion, holder of four national records in different distances, our Captain.

"You looked like feces out there," he says.

I move my bruised arm, washing myself.

"Well that bastard's going after me."

"That's not how I see it," he says.

"What do you know?"

"That you're smashing up his car, you're bloodying his nose. I don't want to hear any bullshit explanations. Just cut it out."

"Right," I say.

"Look, I don't like him either," Murph says. "And I know your times are catching up with his. But as long as he's beating you . . ."

"He's right and I'm wrong."

"You got it," Murph says.

When I get outside in the frigid February night, I walk over to my Charger and find somebody's smeared dogshit on the windshield. Somebody. I throw handfuls of snow onto the windshield and turn the wipers on until it's all gone.

It doesn't stop there either. At school, he's always bumping up against me in the hallway, and trying to steal my trigonometry homework and writing graffiti in the bathrooms and signing my name and heaving iceballs at me on the way to the cafeteria. And after school when we head down the long curving driveway past the barn and the old grape arbors I'll look in the rearview and discover a white Trans Am with a blue racing stripe about a foot off my rear fender, which will suddenly appear on my left side, inches away from my door, and ease closer and closer trying to slide me off the curve into the ditch.

But mostly we go for each other in the water. If I get a long line of scratches down my back one lap then I make sure to ratchet him into the lane dividers on the next. If I get a fist in my face on one lap he gets a foot in the nuts on the turn. If I get a mouthful of water he gets an elbow in the neck. Who ever said swimming was a non-contact sport?

Friday, March twenty-second. An Away meet, against Shadyville, last year's Conference Champion. We've bussed three hours down from Country Day, through hills so bumpy that it seems like the glacier just left yesterday, and I'm sitting here on the bench, shivering and nauseous. Across from us sits the Shadyville team in their black racing suits. Six knees to my left is Joey Rubino. And along the length of the pool, the Shadyville crowd. At the far end are about a half dozen of our supporters, including my girl Patti Lynn.

Patti Lynn is something. Patti Lynn is blonde and Lutheran and smart and a real mean butterfly: girls' regional champion in the 100 Fly and the 200 I.M., and she's been critiquing my stroke over at the Vapion Club, which is down behind the Triple-A in Lyndgryth, about a mile from the Lower School; I've been meeting her after swim practice and on weekends for that few thousand yards extra to give me a handle on Rubino. It's incredible when the two of us get in the pool together, in that steamy, overheated Vapion Club which is mostly frequented by Triple-A employees and by members of the Episcopal Diocese House from around the corner: the two of us take off down the pool, dolphin-kicking in unison, our arms rising out of the water together, the place fills with the boom of our kicks and the hazy green water achieves a unique configuration of standing waves so nobody else even dares to get in the water.

I exaggerate.

But anyhow, Patti Lynn sits over there watching me during the first few events, and when Rubino gets up for the 200 Medley Relay I see her lean forward, ready to dissect out the fine points of his stroke. Not that it has any fine points. It's a power-stroke, really, a matter of big shoulders and fat-muscled arms just tearing through the water like it was cheesecloth. There's no art to it, just hormones and benchpresses. But it's fast, and when our backstroke touches, a foot ahead of Shadyville, and when Rubino dives in and punches out the water like it was my face and glides and comes out kicking I can tell that Patty Lynn's computer's going. At the turn she motions to the clock. She's right: a slow turn. Second lap, even though he's increased his lead, his arms hit too flat, as she tells me by holding her arms out with thumbs pointed down.

Time my event comes I'm dizzy with cold. We're ahead, 42 to 23, so it's no matter of anything but what's between Rubino and my own self. I walk the long way around the pool so I can go by Patti Lynn.

"Also his head's too high," she says.

"Right," I say.

I mount the block. I'm in Lane 1, against the wall, which I don't like, and Rubino's to my right, and then the two Shadyvillers. My toes curl down over the edge of the red fiberglass block. I bend low, touching them, weight balanced so the slightest breeze would knock me into the water. Already I'm going: stroke, kick-kick stroke, kick-kick.

"Swimmers take your mark."

I inhale.

The gun.

At the end of four laps I touch him out by hundredths of a second. There's cheering, I spit water out of my lungs, I sink under and come up to find Lindstrom crouching over me.

"What time?" I say.

"Fifty-four two," he says.

"Whew! No shit!" I dance off the lane divider, go under again, surface. Lindstrom's pocked face is still low.

"Get out," he says. I pull myself out and walk with him over to the bench, as the announcer calls out the new school and pool record, and someone from one of the local papers takes a couple of flash pictures.

"That stank," Lindstrom says.

"What do you mean?"

"You should have been disqualified. You made an illegal turn."

"I touched!"

"I don't want to hear it," he says.

I sit on the bench, furious, through the rest of the meet, and afterwards I dodge the reporters—three or four of them this time, from the *Akron Blade* and the *Shadyville Sun* and the *Toledo Star*, come to report on the schoolboy butterfly duel, three new records in four weeks—and I nearly walk past Patty Lynn, who's waiting outside near the bus.

"What's the problem?" she says.

I explain.

"Oh, he's all full of it," she says. "He just does that. That's the Lindstrom style. He wants you to never be able to please him."

"I don't know that I ever wanted to," I say.

"You don't have any choice." She kisses me and slides inside her green MG and takes off down the drive, spattering gravel, and I trudge back to the schoolbus, where old DeFreeze is at the wheel and everybody's scrunched in their letter jackets, drinking Cokes and speed-feeding Ding Dongs, Twinkies and Sno-Balls.

"Hey! Here's the man!" says von Dolph, our backstroke.

"Schoolboy hero!" says Tom Wonder.

"Hey," says Murph McMann, who is sitting at the back of the bus with the élite of the team. "Fly back here!"

I come back, slapping the seat-backs with my palms.

When Rubino comes on everybody boos. And then Coach Lindstrom, looking sourer than ever, lowers his stony-faced eminence into the right front seat, and old DeFreeze puts the bus in gear and we shudder off over bumpy hills, north toward Country Day, all us record holders in the back of the bus crouched over Polaroids of Murph McMann's girlfriend sticking her fingers up you know where.

Now, metaphysically speaking, in the context of the six billion year existence of the universe and the continuous state of expansion and collapse of all matter and the unknowable probability of the existence of God, a battle to the death between two high school seniors over the speed in which they can cover four laps of a small rectangle of water using a standardized rhythmic but somewhat bizarre method of locomotion may not seem of utmost importance; but from an only slightly different philosophical perspective it could at least theoretically achieve the same importance as the detonation or non-detonation of a nuclear device over a large inhabited metropolitan center, i.e, the crucial issue being whether or not you are one of those two murder-minded butterflies or perhaps an innocent swimmer in the same lane.

So what continues that Spring over the next dozen meets in various pools scattered across a several hundred mile area of glacial morain, in car towns and steel towns, coal and rubber towns, from prep school to day school to seminary, is what could be either a trivial contest or the battle of the century. One week at Eastern Reserve I lower the school record by two tenths. The next week at Friski Prep, fattened by what I suspect are exogenous hormones, Rubino surges ahead at the last moment and touches me out. The following week at Rockland Baptist, I make an all-out effort and do without oxygen long enough to napalm several million brain cells and knock old fatso back by one entire second. State record. Fifty-one point six.

The papers are gone wild. And the crowds have grown to the point that dozens have to be turned away. Even MidWest TV Magazine has come and done a mini-segment on the two schoolboy warriors. And at home I've been getting letters from Yale and San Diego and Santa Clara and Indiana, and solicitous phone calls late at night, coy questions whether I have considered the need for further educational development. Patti Lynn tells me that Joey Rubino is the best thing that ever happened to me.

It's in April, two days after I break the NorthEastern U.S. Record, that something I still don't understand happens. Half a mile before Amy Joy Donuts my foot comes off the accelerator and my hand turns the wheel right and my Charger eases to a dead halt—Rubino, who's been tailing me, zooms by on Mayland Avenue, flipping me the bird. I vegetate there, head on the steering wheel, feeling so awful, so sad and so weird because there's no reason for it that all I can do is dry heave. Traffic roars past. The upholstery gets cold. I listen to the radio, O-105, the music that keeps Ohio rocking, but I can't move. A long while later, when it's getting dusky, I u-turn through the EastGate Mall.

Eventually I end up at Lyndgryth High. It is a squat brick building with solar panels and a lot of wood chips and little dwarf pines and railroad ties, and it is where Patti Lynn goes. I park, I look at myself in the rearview mirror, then I go around back to the athletic building. Inside I sit on the bleachers on the side of the gleaming fifty-meter pool. I'm breathing girlishly. The Lyndgryth team is working out, boys on one side, girls on the other, and I've just barely picked out which of the blue tanksuits contains Patti Lynn when the coach comes over and requests me to leave. So I sit on Patti's MG until she appears an hour later.

"What are you doing here?" she says.

"Nothing special," I say.

"No practice?"

"Oh, there's practice," I say.

"Why aren't you there?"

"I'm quitting."

"Quitting? What, quitting the team?"

"Quitting swimming."

"Oh, for God's sake, you can't do that. You only have one puny record. You're only starting."

"Exactly," I say. "It's not worth it. I'd rather help you further your career."

"You idiot," she says. "You don't have any choice. Face it, you're a swimming machine."

"I'm not interested in speed anymore," I say.

She laughs. She comes up real close like she's going to kiss me, and I can see jewels of water in her hair and chapped lips and the faint red ovals left by her swim goggles and I smell chlorine, but all she does is punch my belly. She doesn't know how that raises tears in me.

"I thought I might be imagining it," she says. "But it's true."

"What?"

"The greenish tone of your skin. There's a layer of fishscales developing under your epidermis. They're what's shining through."

"Bull!"

"It's true. Your body's reverting to a preamphibian format. You can't fight it," she says. "Reverse evolution—it's inexorable." She frenches my face, but I tear away and run behind her car. "Zant. Zant. Zant, come on, don't you see? You *are* butterfly."

"Fuck butterfly!" I say. And then we have one screaming hell of a fight.

All the state papers are there, and two TV stations, that Saturday at St. Iguana's. Saints, as we call it, has a fast pool: glittering new tiles, crisp lighting, a flawless filtration system that actually seems to thin down the water and grease it up so you slide through like an egg down a buttery pan. It's the fastest pool in the Midwest. But that won't do me shit. I've missed practice all week. I wouldn't be here at all if it wasn't for that bitch Patti Lynn, who's standing by the diving board talking with Lindstrom, plotting for me, maybe. Or against me, I can't tell. I'm so low I can hardly move, and when my event is called and everybody starts clapping in unison and calling Zant, Zant, Zant, Zant, Murph McMann has to belt me a couple times across the kidneys to get me up.

"Move your flappers, Zant!"

I lumber up toward the starting blocks. This time I'm in Lane 2, and Rubino's by the wall. And, you know, I can't summon up an ounce of hatred for the guy. I mean, hell, he's had a hard life, with his parents divorcing sophomore year and his father investigated just last Fall for tax securities fraud. It's enough to bring tears to your eyes. And when the gun goes off I just stand on the block, watching him and the two Saints dive, until I hear Patti Lynn's hideous shriek, and then I go for it.

Third place.

Patti Lynn stalks out without a word.

And on the way back to Country Day, I sit at the front of the bus, hunched over the wheel-cover, while Rubino's popping Cheetos in the back with Murph and von Dolph, all of them roaring.

That night I have a dream I'm choking Mark Spitz to death with the ribbons of seven Olympic gold medals. And the next day, carrying a wet bundle of Speedos and goggles and flippers and innertubes and moldy white towels, I enter Coach Lindstrom's glass-windowed office beside the pool to let him know that I hate swimming even more than I hate Joey Rubino.

"Congratulations," says Coach. "You're finally living up to my expectations."

"So it's set?" I say. "I quit and Rubino goes on to the Green River Relays." That's the final event of the season, when all prep schools in the quint-state area gather at Green River for the nationally televised relays: winners advance to the schoolboy nationals. I dump the bundle on a chair.

"Now hold on a second," says Coach. "What do you know about hate?"

"Hate?" I say. "It doesn't last. I despised Rubino, now I'm thrilled to give him anything he wants. It's an exhaustible emotion. It's finite. It's not the basis for durable achievement."

"Do me a favor," he says, by the way of which I know I don't have any choice.

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"Okay, what?"

"Just show up at practice tomorrow, that's all."

"Only as a favor," I say.

So I show up the next afternoon, and go into the locker room to get dressed, and on my way past the showers I hear water running, and look around the corner, and there's Rubino, stark naked, shaving the hair off his legs. The tile floor's a mess of shaving cream and curly black hairs and blood.

"What the fuck you doing?" I say.

"You faggot," he says. "Haven't you ever heard of shaving down?"

I laugh.

"That Patti Lynn is a good lay," he says. "I've been screwing her blind for months."

I laugh.

"I'm going to Green River," he says. "The U.C. Head Coach called up this morning to personally wish me luck."

"Luck?" I say.

"You're not getting out of that pool alive," he says.

"I'm really cowed," I say. "Look, I'm just here as a favor to Coach. It's fine with me if you go to Green River. Best wishes. I forgive you."

At that he lunges for me and pushes me into the shower tap. As I fall my leg catches Rubino right up high, and when I'm up again, wiping blood off the hot water tap, he's still writhing around on the tiles, groaning.

I saunter out to the pool.

The team is lined up between the bleachers and the shimmering water.

"How delightful you've graced us with your presence," Coach says, and begins the stretching exercises. I stretch but it doesn't do much good, and by the time we hit the water I'm still all clove-hitched in.

The first few laps it's only me and Wonder and Feffer, then just as I come out of a turn there's a huge splash about three inches away, and before I know it half my face is sanded off by leg stubble in a vicious flutter kick. I fall back. Let him pass. Mellow out. Even Wonder, even punky little Feffer pass me, though after Rubino hurtles past for the third or fourth time I see that Wonder has stopped at the shallow end, choking. And the next lap, Feffer stops midway, clutching the lane divider, twitching around what seems to be a permanent void in his solar plexus.

And then it's just me and Rubino. I slide to the side to let him pass me. I dodge his fists in the turns. I wriggle every which way. I'm a Quaker of the water, a floating Mhatma Gandhi. There are occasional thuds to my lower vertebrae. And kicks that dislodge my goggles, pouring water in. And razor sharp fingernails that scrape down my back, leaving a faint ribbon of blood eddying behind me. I nearly believe I'll get through practice in one piece, but then I come out of a turn and meet a jarring fist in the face that feels like it's making my neck close neighbors with my appendix. I gag into tears. I cease my ridiculous freestyling and begin a screaming water-whomping butterfly. My arms machete into Rubino's neck on a turn, I dolphin him in the groin on the next. He rises up into a butterfly too, and we meet mid-lane going opposite directions, our arms crossing like steel thresher blades, the water rising in furious waves, heads cracking, our teeth, it seems, littering the bottom of the pool. Kick-kick stroke, kick-kick stroke, we're killer tractors mowing down the same row of corn, Dodgems with landbased missiles strapped on. I've never known such hate. Finally after one turn he stops—he's not coming out of it—and next time I'm at that end of the pool he's being lifted out of the water.

Afterwards, Coach desires to see me in his office.

I wobble before his desk, gasping, my ribs complaining with each breath, my mouth slick with blood.

"That was barely adequate," he says.

"Thank you, sir." I turn to leave.

"Wait," he says. I stop at the threshold. "You only know about failure," he continues. "You are utterly ignorant. You want me to give the Relay spot to Rubino after all that?"

"Correct."

"Well maybe I will and maybe I won't. You want me to throw you off the team, is that right?"

"Correct."

"Well maybe I will and maybe I won't," he says, smiling gently. "You can go."

I'm on my way out, to throw my Speedo and goggles away forever.

"Hold on," he says.

"*What*?" I snap.

"Did this teach you anything new?"

"No. Hate's a bore."

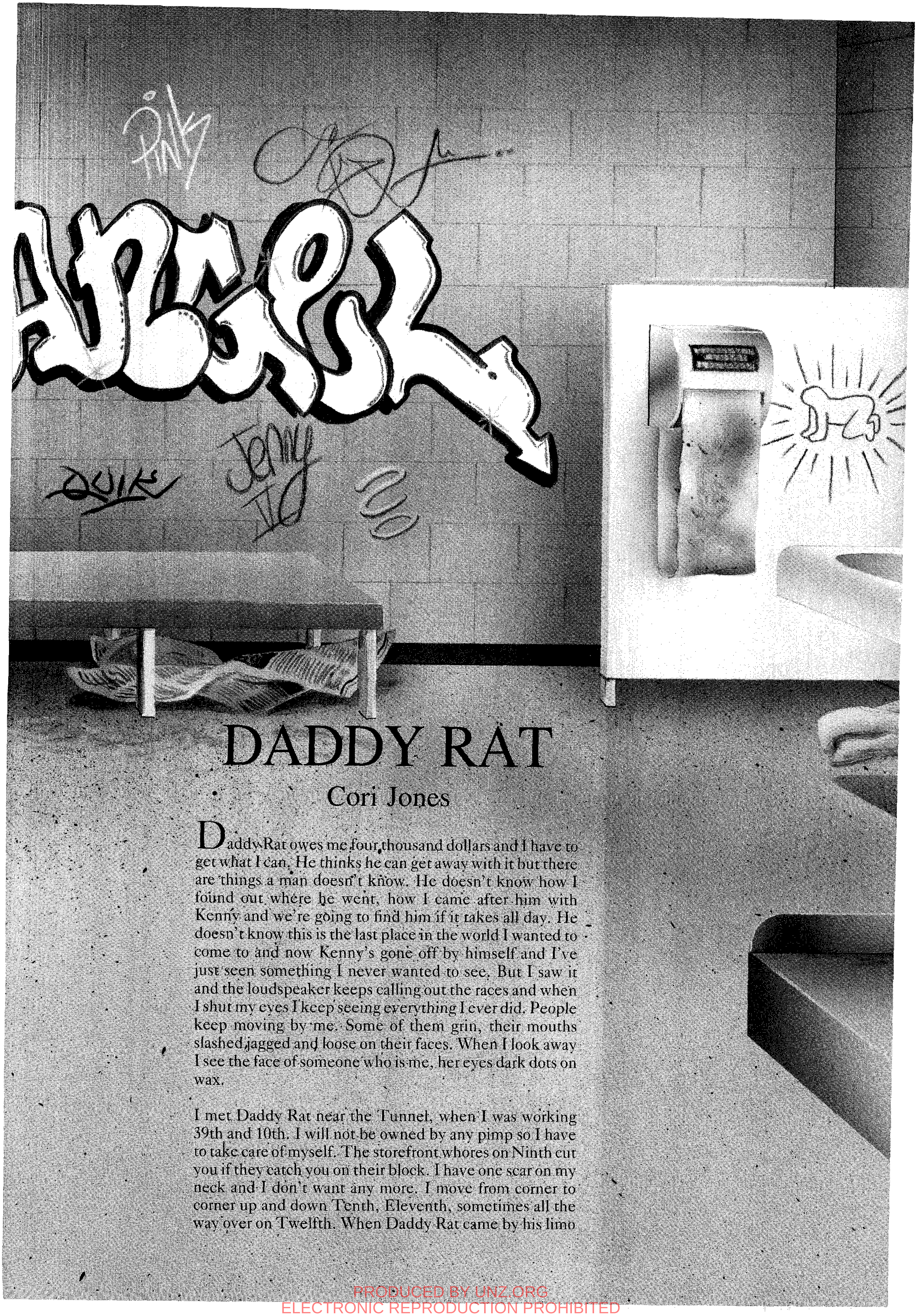
"Every genius is a paranoid," he says. "Hate is an ocean. Hate is larger than the known universe."

"Bullshit," I say, enraged.

"You understand me completely," he says.

So that's why I'm here right now. My legs itch under my jeans. My letter jacket chafes my shaved pits. I'm eating Ding Dongs, chug-a-lugging GatorAde, as the bus bounces down toward Green River. All over the Midwest, swim scouts are rising, having hearty breakfasts at Ramada and Holiday Inns, making a last phone call to Coach. And from all over the Midwest come buses just like this, filled to only a third of capacity with the best of the best: converging as the sun rises over humpy cornfields on the town of Green River, where the TV folks are stringing lights over a blue rectangle of water and testing their simulbroadcast systems. And from somewhere near Lyndgryth High, a green MG comes snaking through the hills, driven by Patti Lynn, my furious, my wild, my water-breathing love.

At the front of the bus, opposite old black DeFreeze, who's chomping a lug of tobacco in his stained gums, sits Coach Lindstrom, sullenly and rigidly facing forward, the nastiest son of a bitch in at least five states, a master of love. And here at the back of the bus, we geniuses of the water, record holders all, have fallen silent. In yesterday's practice we tied the national record. Me, I am scared of this greatness. There's a hole at the bottom of my heart, an assassin emerging, squeezing his way out. Where's my next Rubino, I wonder—faster, meaner, hatefuller, flying in my lane. □

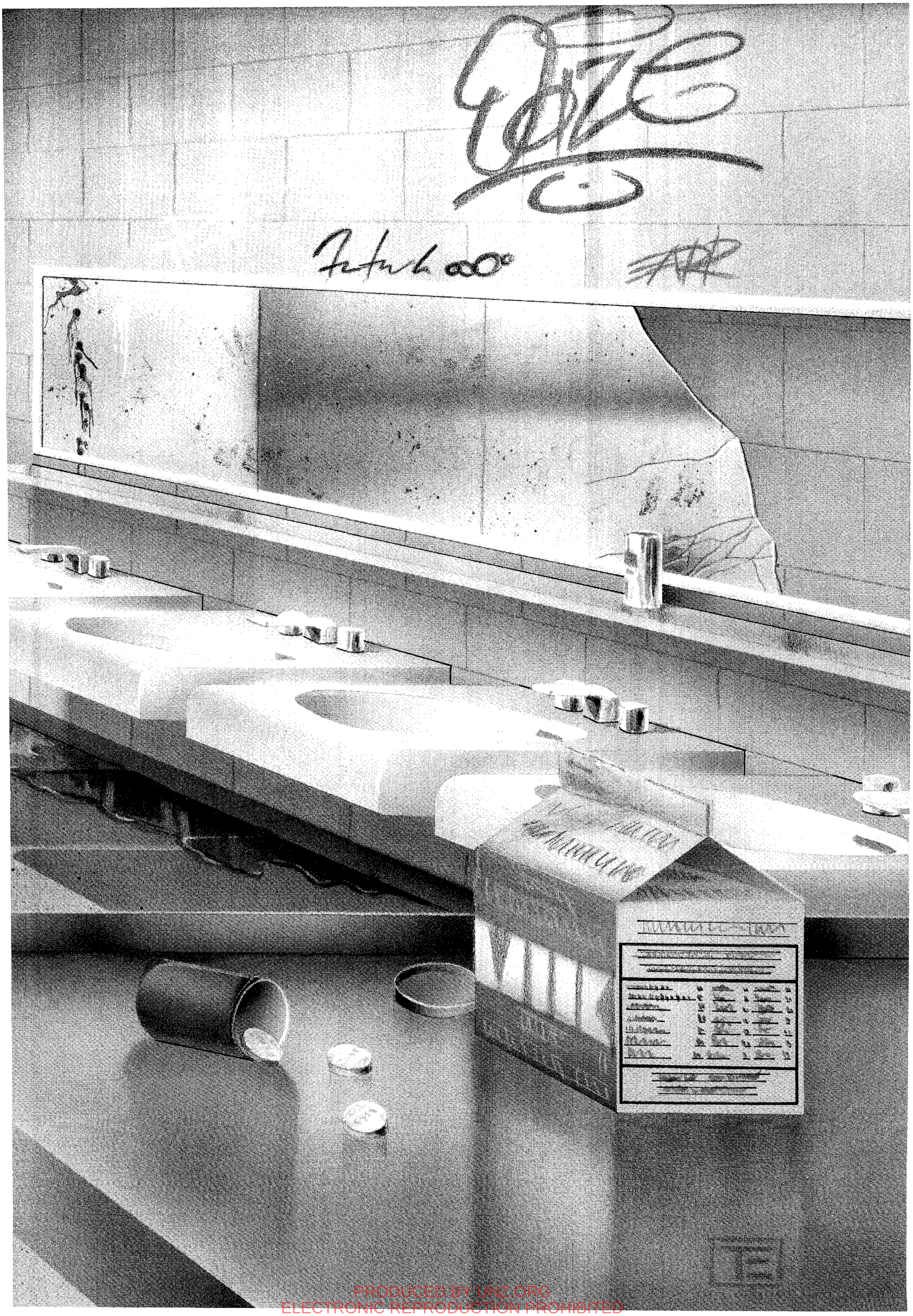


DADDY RAT

Cori Jones

Daddy Rat owes me four thousand dollars and I have to get what I can. He thinks he can get away with it but there are things a man doesn't know. He doesn't know how I found out where he went, how I came after him with Kenny and we're going to find him if it takes all day. He doesn't know this is the last place in the world I wanted to come to and now Kenny's gone off by himself and I've just seen something I never wanted to see. But I saw it and the loudspeaker keeps calling out the races and when I shut my eyes I keep seeing everything I ever did. People keep moving by me. Some of them grin, their mouths slashed, jagged and loose on their faces. When I look away I see the face of someone who is me, her eyes dark dots on wax.

I met Daddy Rat near the Tunnel, when I was working 39th and 10th. I will not be owned by any pimp so I have to take care of myself. The storefront whores on Ninth cut you if they catch you on their block. I have one scar on my neck and I don't want any more. I move from corner to corner up and down Tenth, Eleventh, sometimes all the way over on Twelfth. When Daddy Rat came by his limo



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was gray in the mist. I leaned into the window, smelled peppermint and stale smoke. He said he was lonely and a tall girl with big tits was just what he needed. He held up some bills. His gut was fat but his face was pointy and sharp. I whispered what I tell them in his ear and after I got in next to him he drove me behind a warehouse. He told me to do him. I will not tell all of it but he held my head down and his fingers were thick on my neck. They turned into a fist that tugged at my hair, pulled me up. He stared me straight in the face. Out the window I saw ashes floating in the mist. I didn't move. I imagined his fingers squeezing, my lungs folding in on themselves. One of the windows in the warehouse was broken. Black daggers mixed with shards of glass. When he let me go my arms started tingling and I couldn't feel my fingers. He zipped up his pants and leaned back against the seat. He said he could see I was a smart girl and I didn't punk out easy. I heard a foghorn somewhere. Then he asked me if I thought a smart girl would pass up the opportunity to make more money than she ever made in her life. When I shook my head he laughed, then he told me about his movie. He said it was called *Sensuous Savage* and told me the things I'd have to do. When he said what he'd pay me I thought about where I sleep. Sometimes it's in Penn Station. I keep my stuff in a locker there and I always carry the key. Sometimes it's in the place downtown on Stanton Street that I found with Carla. It's a trashed-out shell of a building but the basement has a room with walls. We cleaned it up but in the dark sometimes the rats' eyes glow red. The things Daddy Rat was telling me didn't sound any worse than the things I do every night. I said yes and I met him the next night. He made me wait at Forty-Eighth and Twelfth under the highway, shadows of Spanish graffiti on the girders. When I got in his limo he pointed out at the street, said Baby I am delivering you from poverty. When we drove off I heard foghorns again.

He drove me to a place on 43rd a few blocks from the river. It took four nights and Sancho's camera, a 35-millimeter thing that made sharp noisy clicks. They fed me lots of ludes. I don't remember everything but I know Kenny and I did just about all the stuff a man and woman can do. I know Daddy Rat found Kenny down on Christopher Street because I heard what he told Sancho. You want a good stud star, he told Sancho, go down to Christopher Street. Get yourself some coked-up Nautilus faggot like that one. They're always starving for cash. They'll do anything. They gave Kenny all the lines he wanted and they tried to give one to me. When I said no Sancho grabbed my hair, pinched the stuff into my nostril. I held my breath, shut my eyes tight. When I sneezed I saw Carla in our room on Stanton Street, poking her arm for veins. I thought Daddy Rat would hit me but he didn't. He just yelled You big stupid cunt get over there on the floor let's wind this thing up. The last night we finished at dawn. He put lots of bills right into Kenny's hand but he told me to come back later. Then he made us leave. Kenny and I walked east on 43rd over to Eighth. I saw the sun coming up ahead of us, red and yellow and pink. Kenny didn't speak. After he got in a taxi he turned around and waved. I walked down to Penn Station and washed up, then I went to my locker. I took out my best shorts, shiny emerald silk, and the silk tank top that matches them. I only steal from good places and I only take what I need. The place on 43rd was quiet, Sancho blowing smoke alone on the stoop. When he saw me he laughed, said You theenk thee ol fock'd wait for thee Jolly Green Giant. I got that feeling that hits me sometimes, like the sidewalk is black and it's pulling me down into it. Down the block a radio was pulsing out aayyyyyjamba-jamba. When I sink down like that I have to get back up. I took a long breath, easy and slow. I looked at Sancho. I said Tell me where he is and I'll do you for free. There was a piece of plastic on the sidewalk blowing around at his feet. He picked it up and flicked it at me, said he'd spent four nights filming me doing Kenny and that was enough for him. I looked at his belt, saw cracks in the leather like threads. I sucked on my lip and looked down, said I couldn't've done Kenny without your help Sweet Boy. His hand moved up to his mouth and he blew the smoke out slow. He shrugged. Track, he said. Sa-ra-to-ga. Ol fock wen to thee races. When I walked away my fingers were tingling and I tasted metal in my throat. I used to live in Saratoga and I swore I'd never go back. But Daddy Rat owed me four thousand dollars and I had to follow him where he'd gone. I stopped in some crab hole deli on Eighth and bought a pint of milk. When the counter boy was getting me change I reached into the basket next to the register and slipped three brownies in my purse. There were two cops sipping coffee at the counter and I drank the milk outside. I get thirsty a lot and it's cheap. I used to eat lots of ice cream but a girl on the street can't lick a cone without some man saying something about the way her tongue moves around. I never let them come after me like that. I took little sips and watched the avenue, followed fire escapes with my eyes. They were shiny and black in the heat and they climbed almost up to the sky. My neck itched. I didn't want to go to Saratoga alone because Daddy Rat might work me over. The only reason he paid Kenny, probably, was because Kenny has muscles and looks like he can act fast with his fists. I'd go down to Christopher Street and find him. I'd make him go with me and I'd be safe.

So I went to my locker and put my sneakers on. I walked down Eighth toward Christopher Street and started thinking about all the avenues in the city, all the streets. I walk all over New York, even when I'm not working, but I keep away from Fifth. When I was in second grade we came here for a sociology professors' convention. My dad went to meetings and my mom and I took walks. We walked all the way up Fifth to the Park, then we turned around. The sky was clear blue and the wind smelled like spring. Somewhere down in the Village we saw three black men playing a radio and dancing. The air around them smelled smoky and warm and one of them winked at me. When I laughed my mom grabbed my hand, said Don't look, Mary Ellen, don't look. Her hair kept blowing around and I saw threads of gray in the brown. She used to teach art at the college where my dad teaches but at the end of that spring she quit. When I got down to Christopher Street I wasn't thinking about Kenny at all. I was thinking about my mom's studio, the little room my dad built her in the attic. But I saw Kenny

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right away and I remembered why I'd walked down there. He was on the street, hanging out with some of his friends. He didn't look bad, tight white shorts and a black skinny top, his arms all muscled and brown. When I waved to him he stared. He was standing against the curb and there was a pothole right in front of him. There were two flares burning next to it and when I walked over to him black smoke curled up around his legs. One of his joyboy pals had a tattoo on his chin, pink popsicle with two red sticks. He said Oh Miss Tall Doll are those tits real and I looked over at Kenny. He tapped his foot, stared down at the smoke. A yellow car whizzed by, squealed its brakes at the red light up the block. Someone threw a bottle out the window and it shattered against the curb. I stood there and stared at all of them. I waited till the sidewalk wasn't pulling me down and then I said it. I said How about you boys go get yourselves a lollipop, lick it nice and slow? I got to talk to my brother here. I started walking and Kenny came with me. In my sneakers I was about an inch taller than him. Cars kept honking. We walked west, toward the river. He kept snapping his fingers and looking around. The sun had burned through the haze and I smelled all the heat wave smells, shit and river funk and tar. Before I opened my mouth he said Listen Sabrina don't ever call me your brother again. Shut up, I told him. You got to help me. He laughed but I kept talking. I told him how Daddy Rat hadn't given me a cent and what Sancho said about Saratoga. I said I was going there and he was going with me. He put one hand on his hip, said Is that so Miss Bosswhip. In the sun his hair was almost red. When we made the movie Sancho kept bright lights on and I couldn't see the color of anything. An old woman walked by, sweating in a navy blue dress. She had a tan scarf wrapped around her hand and when she looked at us she wiped her face. Kenny started whistling and looking at his nails. Then he looked up. His eyelashes were very dark. I don't owe anything, he said. Not to any jailbait whore. I've been called worse but that got down into my throat and I tasted metal again. After the first night of filming he went to the White Tower with me. He was jumpy from all the lines he'd done but we drank coffee and sat for a long time. When I told him I'd made up the name *Daddy Rat* he laughed, looked me right in the eyes. He said Good one Sabrina That's good. But a man never remembers things like that and all of a sudden I got mad. You don't come with me, I said, all your coked-up sweetass friends are gonna know about Mister Movie Star and how he tamed a sensuous savage. Up the street a woman yelled at a poodle. She had on a green hat that looked bigger than the dog. Plastic grapes were sewn into the side. The dog squatted on the sidewalk and she yanked at the leash. When I looked at Kenny he made an O with his mouth. *Kenny*, I said. He shrugged. I'm a rich boy now, he said. I guess I can afford a day at the races.

This is what I did next.

I went back to Stanton Street to check on Carla, but she wasn't there. She turns tricks sometimes over by one of the bridges. I wanted to tell her I might be gone for awhile but she'd been away so much lately I figured she wouldn't know the difference. On the mattress was one of her scarves, a deep turquoise print. She has lots of them, and I still have her purple one I used in the movie. Next to the scarf was a bag of chocolate chip cookies, still sealed up. I put it in my purse. A lot of the time she's too strung out to eat and I figured she might not want them anyway. I walked across town to Broadway, and all the way up to Penn Station I kept thinking about her. Once we were hungry and we hit the A&P. We paid for a half gallon of milk, then we walked out the exit door with steaks in our purses. When we got back to our place we couldn't start a fire so we ate them raw, tore the meat with our teeth. We were both luded up; we kept laughing. When we lay down to sleep I felt warm all over. But Carla kept shivering and she said her stomach hurt. Later when she puked I yelled at her, but there wasn't much to clean up because most of it sank into the dirt on the floor.

I took lots of things from my locker: my makeup, my black flowered pantyhose, my wig, extra panties, Carla's purple scarf, the pillow I carry to sleep on. I stuffed it all in my nylon bag and added everything from my purse. Then I folded up my red silk dress and put it in with everything else. It's the best one I've got and it makes me look older. I changed into my green heels and put my red ones in the bag. Then I counted out some money. I put sixty in the side pocket along with my bottle of ludes. I carried it into the ladies' lounge and lay down. I slept for awhile. When I walked over to the Port Authority it was almost dark. By the time I got there I had eighty dollars because I found a man in a car. He pulled over on 39th and I stopped. When he said what he wanted I looked around. There was no one on the street and I got in. I used both hands and it was over quickly. I wiped them on the seat, watched his lips move while he lay back, whispering.

When I found Kenny he made me pay for his ticket. He had on the same top, the same shorts, and he was carrying a nylon bag over his shoulder. It was shaped like mine but it was bright green and it looked like it glowed in the dark. When I went into the ladies' room I popped a lude, ran water over my face. After two round-trip tickets I didn't have that much money left and I wanted it to be safe. I put most of it into the main part of my bag, stuffed it into a shoe. After we got on the bus Kenny rubbed his nose and stared at the seat in front of him. My feet hurt and I wished I'd worn my sneakers, but if I had to turn any tricks I wanted to look my best. After the bus pulled out of the station every thought in my head started going off like a gun. The bus felt stuffy like my house always used to. I wondered when the lude would hit me. My mom hated to open windows. She said all the things from outside, noises and colors and smells, made something tighten like a band around her head. Once one summer it was hot and I could smell her paint all the way into my room. I went up to her studio because I wanted to ask her something but when I found her I knew there was nothing I could say. She was sitting on the floor, hands over her ears, crying. The window was open and her canvas was covered with black. I tried to say *mom* but nothing came out. I remembered the canvas, the smudges of black on her hands, and I held my bag close to me. The pillow made it soft. I stared out the window, watched the street float around. The bus was starting to hum. It moved, stopped, then moved again. All of a sudden I sat up straight because the tunnel should have been there but it wasn't. I put my hands on the seat in front of me and my arms did a strange still dance. When I came to New York the first time the bus wound down through back roads, into New Jersey, and by late afternoon the skyscrapers and the river got close. I remembered all of it pink and silver and blue and the sun setting somewhere and the tunnel so low and dark I didn't feel awkward and tall. Now my arms were floating and I could smell Kenny's sweat and Daddy Rat's face kept coming back to me. The bus wouldn't get off the street. I rested my hands on my bag and leaned back. I saw cars, a sign for 110th Street, dark hungry men swimming along the curb. On the corner I saw a woman with her hair held back by a huge dark clip. She stood with her hands on her hips, swaying, singing out something I couldn't hear. I shut my eyes. A man behind me said he didn't care if he bet every last cent, he was going to have a good time at the track no matter what. A woman told him goddammit *she* cared. Their words kept echoing and somewhere I saw horses, a track, a ten-dollar bill. I saw Daddy Rat again, his hands rubbing me with oil before we started the filming. I felt myself jerking and something like silk tickling my lap and a white lude cloud lifting me into itself. When we got to Albany it was still night. Kenny woke me up, led me off the bus. He took me into a room where an old brown man was mopping. I saw a row of chairs, orange plastic on a long steel line. After I sat down he walked off somewhere. When he came back he sat down next to me, kept tapping his feet. The room wouldn't stop buzzing. I leaned over, felt my bag reach up soft and gray toward my face.

The bus to Saratoga didn't leave Albany till morning. It got us there by eleven, let us off at a diner on the south end of town. Sometimes when he was finished teaching for the week my dad used to come down here and bring home desserts. He'd buy thick pies, cheesecakes with fruit on top. I stood there in the parking lot with Kenny and looked up the street. A little hill dipped down into the center of town. There were lots of cars. One night a couple years ago my dad brought me into the diner for supper. We had cheeseburgers and shakes and he wouldn't look me in the eye. He finally told me about my mom and the food burned into my stomach. She's going to have to be institutionalized, he said. Just for a couple months. Then he shook his head. She's always been so fragile, he said. I remembered his voice and I looked at Kenny. His hair was longer than mine. I never knew what happened to her in the place they sent her because I was gone before they released her. The parking lot was too crowded and I had to get out of the sun. I have to pee, I told Kenny. In the diner I moved past booths, counters, cases of cakes and pies. My legs felt heavy and loose. In the ladies' room I slammed the door and turned the faucet on hard. When I looked in the mirror I saw the wall behind me, the pink chipped tiles. My eyes had bags under them. My hair was platinum, lighter than my skin. It was almost two inches long, all slicked back with gel. The roots were smudged with dark. The wall had a pull-out towel that hung down over the wastebasket. The cloth was wrinkled, stained pink and red and gray. I'd cleaned up in bathrooms full of piss and puke and shit but I couldn't touch that towel. When I turned off the water the faucet kept dripping. The sink had a brown circle around the drain. When I stared at it the room got buzzy. I pressed my knuckles to my mouth, sucked and sucked till I stopped feeling small. When I walked back outside my stomach felt hollow and sharp. Kenny was combing his hair. A man next to him looked at me and tossed a styrofoam cup on the ground. I took hold of Kenny's arm. Please, I said. Can't we get something to eat? The lude had worn off and the track seemed too far to walk to. I pointed to the diner door. It's cool in there, I told him. Let's get something quick. Kenny stared at me. His eyes were hard and I remembered some trick who kept bickering over money. *Fifty dollars? You didn't even move your ass!* He shook my hand away. You stop your whining, you big overgrown brat, he said. You think I haven't had just about enough of you? You dragged me up here to help you find Daddy Rat and you're not punking out now. Let's get to that track and get it over with. I walked with him out of the parking lot. When we were on the sidewalk he moved ahead of me up the block toward the stoplight. Turn right, I yelled.

We walked past big houses, houses with pillars and turrets. I saw some old brick buildings my dad used to teach in before they moved the college out to the edge of town. I made myself think about that money, what I was going to do when I got it. I was going back to New York and get a suite at the Plaza, right on the top floor. I was going to fill the tub with hyacinth bubbles and order lots of room service and look out at the Park while I soaked. When we turned onto Union Avenue I told Kenny the rest of it was easy; the track was maybe half a mile straight up ahead. I saw trees in the middle of the street, all up and down the divider. When I told Kenny we were on the south side of the street my voice came out of nowhere. He just shrugged and moved ahead again. My feet hurt, but at least my bag wasn't too heavy. I followed him past backed-up cars, kids selling programs, cops with whistles in their mouths. A few times I almost lost him and I had to walk fast. When I got close behind him I stared at his tanned legs, his big green bag, his skinny ass in shorts. I remembered the camera, the White Tower, all the lights on our bodies. I heard him calling me a big overgrown brat and I wanted to yell something mean. I wanted to tell him he looked pretty good for a faggot so all the crowd could turn around and look at him the way they were looking at me. When I saw the grandstand the pain in my feet got hotter. It had a red and white roof, and there were lots of red and white tents on the grass. When I got to the entrance booth Kenny handed me a ticket. I bit my lip. There were people all over the place laughing, drinking beer out of big plastic cups, snapping their fingers to the ghetto blasters on their shoulders. When I tried to focus my eyes and find Daddy Rat the faces started to blur. My mouth was dry and something was going off in my head. When I was little and she still drove the car my mom took me up Union Avenue. This street divides the town into north and south, she told me. Only north is safe. I looked out the car window at the trees and the sky, and even then

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I knew there was something wrong with her. I told her it wasn't true what she said, but I cried when she wouldn't hug me. Kenny pulled me off the asphalt onto dry grass. He kept looking around but all of a sudden I just wanted to sit down. He pointed to a tree. Wait for me here, he said. I'll be back in a bit. I sat down, watched his legs as he moved off into the crowd. I figured he was going to do another line, always another line. Probably the minute we spotted Daddy Rat he'd have to excuse himself and go off for a toot. Men kept walking by: men in tee shirts, men in suits, men with dark tans and gold chains. I imagined myself staring them down, all of them begging for my mouth, every hole in my body. My first trick kept his eyes away from my face. I met him at the mall and he took me to his car. He drove me up Route 9 almost all the way to Glens Falls, and we spent maybe an hour in some motel. When he drove me back to Saratoga he let me off a couple blocks from my house. I couldn't see where Kenny went. Race forms, someone shouted. Get your race forms. There was a refreshment stand across the grass, a green wooden thing. A woman in purple shorts was opening it up. I unzipped the side pocket of my bag, stuck both hands in. I opened my bottle of ludes and took one out. A little girl walked by, holding her mom's skirt. She had a little gold dot in each ear and she kept screaming to her mom that she wanted to ride a horse. Her mom kept pulling her arm. Shut up, she said, or I won't get you a cone. When I swallowed the lude it left a lump in my throat. I reached in the side pocket again, found two dollars. Then I zipped it up. I walked over to the refreshment stand and got in line. People ahead of me shuffled up to the counter, walked off with chips or ice cream or a plastic dish of fries. Everything was in machines or in shelves against the back wall. I couldn't steal any of it. When it was my turn to order I asked the woman for milk. Please, I said, a quart. She shrugged, bent down. I saw her open a refrigerator that came up to her knees. When she handed me the carton it felt waxy and damp. She said she was sorry when she gave me my change. I don't got any big straws, she told me.

I went back under the tree. I took the carton in both hands, pinched it open. I took a few sips and leaned back, moved the carton around in my hands. I saw colors, red and beige. I saw letters that made words. WESTFIELD FARMS NUTRITION INFORMATION MISSING. I held the carton tight, saw my hands on each side of a picture of a girl who was me. The milk went sour in my throat and my nails dug into the wax. There were more words underneath my picture. Mary Ellen Thorpe. Date of birth May 5, 1969. Hair brown, eyes gray. Height five feet eleven inches, weight one hundred thirty-four pounds. Last seen April 6, 1983. Mary Ellen told her father she was going downtown. She never returned home. I looked at the picture again. It was two years old, from ninth grade. My hair was long then, and little dark feathers fluffed out from my face like wings. People kept moving on the asphalt but no one looked at me. I was starting to tingle from the lude but the explosions in my head wouldn't stop. I held my breath, gulped down the rest of the milk. I held my stomach with both hands and counted to ten. Stay down, I whispered. Once Carla got bad smack from some dealer over in East New York. It was dirty in the bag but she had skin like a chicken. That night she got a fever and the shakes. She kept screaming there were monsters going down on her, monsters with fire and teeth. Once in my room at home I thought my mom was going to die. That night with Carla I had a pint of milk. It was still cool and I pressed it against her forehead, listened to the car horns outside, the rats behind the wall. I waited for her to die like I waited for my mom to die when I found her on the floor by my bed, her hands tight around my pink stuffed pig. I felt wax, heard something tear. I wasn't her baby any more is what my mom said. She said she knew this would happen to me and when I tried to go to her I saw something next to her feet, pair of my panties stained crusty and white. I saw them next to her and I didn't know where Kenny was and in the noise and sweat and heat I saw him dead somewhere. All the tricks I'd spit sour and thick out of my mouth swirled around in front of me but those panties I should've washed them I'm sorry I should've washed them out. My hands tore the carton till the picture was a square of wax in my hand. I stuffed it in the left pocket of my shorts and the ground got dark. It started coming up at me like my two eyes in the picture and I knew the lude wasn't going to float me off this time. I pushed my bag underneath my head. It was soft and I wondered if I'd packed my other shoes but then I was sinking down onto grass that was green and black and pebbles that poked into my skin from my neck all the way to my feet.

I'm waiting for Kenny and everything I ever did swirls in front of me like light. The sun's spinning and pebbles bounce me up and down on the ground. Milk is sour in my mouth and Daddy Rat's money is somewhere I can't reach but I have to get to it. A voice keeps echoing fifteen minutes to post time fifteen minutes and my bag is hot under my head. The heat here is worse than the city and when I sit up sweat drops from my nose onto my arm. Over on the asphalt there are too many legs. People are jostling each other like they're trying to get to a train. Over beyond some tents is an escalator with a plastic dome. Dark outlines of shoulders and heads move up toward the red and white roof. Two girls walk by in miniskirts, snapping gum and swaying their hips. When one of them looks at me her hair shines bright orange in the sun. I don't know either of them. I don't. When the other one says something to her she laughs, spills a little of her beer. I shut my eyes, look for Daddy Rat's face in my head. His chin is pointy and his cheeks have scars. I'm sitting on pebbles and grass and two rows of black flowers are moving toward me. A clump of blond hair hangs down next to them. I see a red dress, red sequins around the neckline, Carla's purple scarf. I'm looking at Sabrina's things. I touch my left pocket, feel a wax square under silk. It's a square of Mary Ellen and no one can see it but me. I run my fingers through my short tufts of hair. Sabrina's head is platinum punk and Mary Ellen's head is full of fluffy wings but Sabrina also has a wig and Kenny's holding it. When he bends down and stares I see his eyes. There's blue shadow above them, smudges of black underneath. I see lots of wrinkles around his mouth and he looks older than ever. I know he's close to thirty but he never looked this tired. I grab my bag, yank the main zipper open. Everything's gone but my pillow, even the cookies. I remember the lude sleep on the bus up to Albany, the tickle in my lap, his bag shiny and green over his shoulder. When I stand up my knees are wobbly and I stare at the red heels on his feet. I don't know how he can walk in them. He goes for men but I never knew he dressed up. He never told me anything. In the movie he had to get rough and I still have bruises from his hands. I want to ask him why he left me with a few dollars for a carton of milk. I want to ask him where he found an empty place to change into my things but I see little red threads in his eyes. He looks tired and wild. The voice on the loudspeaker says ten minutes to post time and under the grandstand is a row of windows like cages. I see signs above them, BETS 2-5-10. I don't want to swim through all these faces but I have to get to a window because my dad placed a bet that time I came here with him. That day a groom led one of the horses through the crowd and the horse curled his lip and my dad said he was smiling at me. When I speak to Kenny my voice shakes a little but that's all right. I don't cry. You took my money along with everything else, I tell him. Give it back. I got to go place a bet. His mouth moves like he's going to laugh but he doesn't. He stuffs a pair of panties into my hand. Bills are crumpled up inside them.

When we walk to the window the crowd gets thicker. My right pocket is empty and the panties fit. I take out a five-dollar bill because he didn't leave me much more. Some punk comes up to me, whispers something I can't hear. I jab him with my elbow and he steps back, laughing. The air stinks of beer, sharp and watery like piss. When my dad put down ten dollars he said now and then a person has to take risks even if the odds aren't good. After I place this bet I'm going to watch the races and see the horses again. And then I'm going to clean up and find Daddy Rat.

The betting lines move forward. Across from me a woman in a gray raincoat is chewing gum, blowing bubbles at her racing form. I touch my hair. If my dad is here today he might walk right by me. The two black dudes in front of me edge up to the window. The first one mumbles something, turns around. He puts a ticket in his pocket. The second one says five bills eight win and I see him hand over a five. His friend gulps down some beer. Eight, he laughs. Eight's a fuckin long shot, man! I step up, clear my throat. Five bills eight win. The man behind the window takes my money and a ticket pops out of a slot. I shove it deep inside the pocket with my panties. Someone behind me pushes me out of the way.

We walk toward the plastic dome. Kenny's still holding my wig. A short red-faced man limps toward us, chewing a cigar. His gut is bigger than Daddy Rat's and his tee shirt is wet. He laughs, spits. Can't tell a boy from a girl nowadays. When he points his cigar at us I see orange dots in the ash. Kenny pulls me away. When we step onto the escalator he wobbles in my heels. In the movie I had to wear heels higher than I've ever worn in my life, dig one of the spikes into Kenny's chest till there was real blood. Then I had to get down on my knees so he could punish me. Daddy Rat made me wear the wig in every scene, said it made me look like a big savage beast. Kenny's getting jumpy and he needs another line. I look behind us at all the faces. There's a woman in a hat with peacock feathers, a bald man who keeps swallowing, a woman in a uniform with a retarded girl. The girl's eyes cross and she keeps nodding. Once mom said I should be thankful our whole family was smart. I remember her face then, her sad eyes. When we get to the bleachers every row is packed. Even on tiptoe I can't see a thing. In front of me are steps going down between the rows, but when I start down them a woman pulls me back, fastens a chain across the opening. She keeps hold of my arm. Stand behind this chain here, she says, and you can see good. Kenny's right next to me, looking all around. When I press against the chain I can see everything, just like I could that day when my dad held me on his shoulders because I was too small to see by myself. I see several tracks, circles of grass and dirt, a clean blue pool in the center of them. Those are concentric circles, he explained to me. Way down in front of the steps is the silver starting gate, the horses prancing toward it. The jockeys wear lots of colors: purple and white, blue and yellow, orange and black, red and green. When the gun goes off the crowd goes wild. Someone a few rows down throws his cup of beer in the air. The horses float in clouds of white. The woman points to the track. If you were right down there, she says, you could feel the thunder of them. Kenny says something to me but I can't hear him because people keep yelling out numbers. Hustle Three Kick Ass Two Whatsamatter wit One? Fuckin favorite punked out lookitim! No one says any names. My dad and I made names up for them: Coconut Custard, Lemon Meringue, Chocolate Cheesecake, all the desserts in the diner. In front of us the track is empty and the woman points to a TV screen above my head. I see colors and manes and white clouds but I can't look any more because somewhere soon I will be on another screen with Kenny. Someone yells Kick it Three and the shouting is louder than ever. The woman shakes her head. Eight, she says. Eight by a nose. People are groaning and I dig out my ticket. I hold it out to her and shrug. My dad didn't win that day but he laughed. The loudspeaker says Room to Boom Number Eight unofficial winner and the woman squeezes my hand. I put the ticket back. Then Kenny's pulling me and I see the bald man again. He won't let me go and he's making me run. We run by a bar, an ice cream stand, a row of folding chairs. We keep going till the crowd thins out. Kenny's shoes are gone but I've still got mine. I scream at him to slow down but the bald man's running too. He's close enough to smell and something gleams in his hand. Daddy Rat has hair but I remember his hands pushing me down, stink of his sweat in the air. I remember him saying I'd make more money than I ever made in my life. I stop short, shake off Kenny's hand, but when I swing my bag at the bald man's face he pushes me out of the way. He grab's Kenny's shoulder, spins him around. I see his brown arm, the sleeve of my dress on him, a slash of silver and blood. My foot's in the air and my heel sinks into flesh. The bald man grabs my shoulder but one of my fists moves fast. Something crunches and people keep moving toward us and he grabs his nose with both hands. I see

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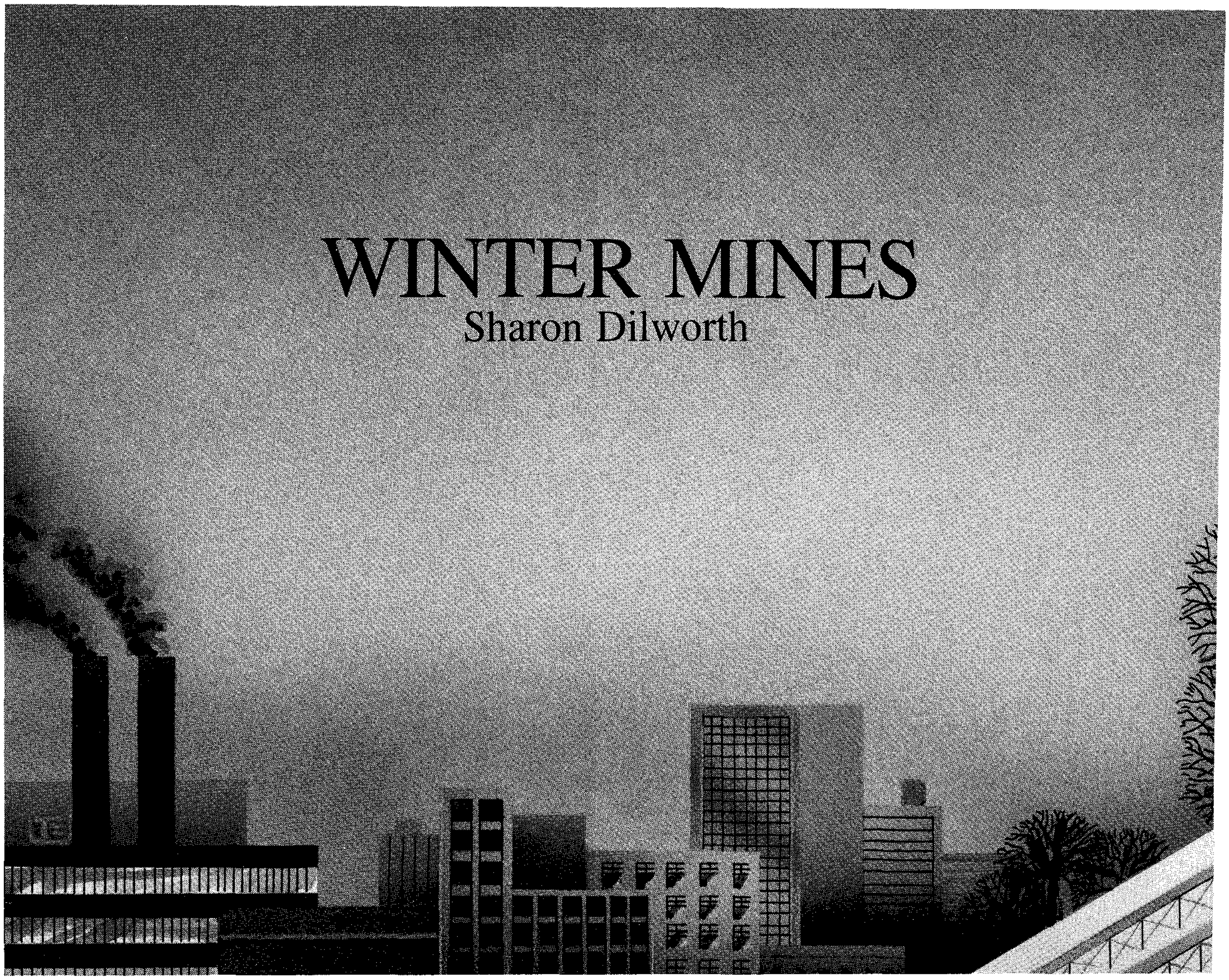
Kenny halfway down a stairway but I'm shaking too hard to move. The bald man keeps gasping. I'm a respectable man, he says. Next time your friend comes around pretending he's a cunt like you he's dead. A few people walk by, stare. They move on. I see Kenny at the bottom of the stairs, one of his shoulders high and stiff. I kick off my shoes. Before the crowd gets too thick I catch up with him and we start running. We run till we're close to the entrance gate. The grass looks cool and we sit down under a tree. I look at Kenny's arm. A stream of red oozes through the sleeve of my dress. I pick apart the shreds of fabric and look. I used to get sick at blood. Once when I skinned my knee I got dizzy and my dad got angry, said maybe I was too fragile like my mom. When I put my hand over the scrape, blood gummed up my palm. I looked up at him, shook my head. I said No. On the street I get worked over sometimes and all there is to do is wash myself off. Kenny's wound is messy but it doesn't look deep. But his hands are shaking and the color's gone out of his face. Maybe he'll faint. I dig in a pocket for my panties but all I pull out is wax. Maybe they'll make us go to the emergency room and the police will come. I shove my picture over his blood. Hold this, I say. I'll be right back. Across the grass is a water fountain. I cup my hands, drink and drink. When my throat starts to close I stop. I hold out my panties, stare at the arc of water that dampens them. The panties mom found were yellow but these are pink. They have little white flowers all over them like the flowers on one of Carla's scarves. When she shot up once she tied it around her arm, held it in her teeth while she shoved the needle in. When she gasped her mouth was round and soft, and the scarf fluttered down across her thighs. I see Kenny looking down, then staring up. He's holding my picture and it's bloody in his hand. When I wash his arm I look at my face with him and nothing comes out of my mouth. Kenny says something about weights. I won't be able to lift, he says. Not for weeks. Things start going off in my head and I grab back my picture. So what, I yell. You stole my stuff. You ruined my best dress and you threw away my best pair of heels. So what if you can't lift weights? Then he grabs my shoulders, starts shaking me hard. A little blood still oozes down his arm. His lips are trembling and his words won't stop. I never put on clothes like this in my life, not before today, he says. Then on the bus I started thinking how I'd gone pretty low in that movie, why not go a little lower, see how the gutter really feels? His fingers dig into my arms and I know they'll leave bruises. You know how it feels? Huh? Mary Ellen Thorpe? I try to shout something but I don't have words for it and it's hard to get air in my lungs. He goes on about my clothes, how he changed in some shed near the stables. His hands won't let me go. He says he got it in his head to turn a trick and the bald man gave him twenty to do him. He says the bald man loved it so bad he pulled the wig off and saw him. Then he came after me, Kenny says. He points to the grandstand. And he almost killed me. I look at his face. The eye shadow is gone. When he raises himself onto his feet I stand up with him. He looks down at his arm. You think it was easy, doing that movie, he goes on. You think I would've gone that low if I didn't need the money? When he wipes his nose I wish I had a line for him, but if I did I'd probably tell him not to do it. The first time he had to fuck me he shook so bad his teeth chattered. I did everything I could with my hands and my mouth, but he couldn't get hard. Daddy Rat started shouting, yelled at Sancho to for Chrissakes put that fucking camera down and *strip*! Take it out and play with it, show this fairy what he wants. I rest my hand on his arm, feel his muscles and blood. I see Sancho unzipping, moving his hands over his cock. First he whispered in Spanish, then he yelled at Daddy Rat and we all heard everything he said. Kenny takes a drink, stands back. I move up to the fountain, hold my picture under the arc of water. The blood thins, runs pale and pink down the drain. Sancho yelled Play with *yours* mothafocka and I saw Daddy Rat's face then, pale and flabby and old, Daddy Rat saying I got nothing to get anyone off with kid. I rub my picture against my thigh and put it back in my pocket. Kenny points to the grandstand wall. An electronic board flashes out EIGHT THREE FOUR. It's official, he says. You won something.

The lines at the windows are long again. The loudspeaker announces the second race and people are jostling each other, just like before. There's a man behind me in a loose white suit, white shiny shoes. His face is very tanned and he's the first man I've seen around here who looks rich. I move up to the window, give a woman my ticket. When she stares at it she moves her glasses around on her nose. Then she hands me money, bill after bill. I crumple it all in my hand and push through the crowd to the ladies' room. In a yellow stall I shove the bolt, lean against the wall. I count. Twenty forty sixty eighty eighty one eighty two dollars and sixty eight cents. I zip it into my bag and my hands feel light. When I walk back out into the people the man is there. I see his white suit, his tan, his straight white teeth. He's waving something and he smells too close. I see a hundred dollar bill, new and crisp and green. He asks what a nice girl will do for this and his voice is smooth and low. I know my mouth is open, round. Daddy Rat waved money from the window of his limo. When he held my head he stayed soft as Kenny did when Sancho had to strip. I point to the hundred, put my hands on my hips. I'll take you down and book you, I tell him. I *happen* to be undercover. Now get out of my way. When I walk away I don't turn around.

Kenny's still by the fountain. Come on, I say. Let's get out of here. We're never going to find him in a crowd like this. When we get outside the gate I'll tell him about my money. I'll wait for him while he goes somewhere and changes. Then we'll walk back into town. I remember this funky boutique up the street from the diner and I can buy myself some sandals there, maybe something nice for Carla. Carla can get me more ludes. When we wait for the bus we'll get lots of food. Then I guess we'll go back. I'm going to stay awake on the bus this time because I know the sun will set somewhere on the road. I'll look out the window and I'll watch it. It'll go down behind hills and green trees and when it sinks it'll give off rays of light. Just before it disappears I'll see them shoot up toward the sky, red and purple and silver and gold, all of the colors on the earth. □

WINTER MINES

Sharon Dilworth



Everyone's heard by now that Barbara Wyatt swallowed half a can of Dranō. My husband says, in this town, news like that doesn't need any help getting around, people just want to talk about it. Nancy Whitney was in the supermarket on Third Street this morning and she told me she heard Barbara did it in front of a full length mirror. They found her on the bathroom hamper where she had ripped off her sweater and torn her blouse trying to release the burning pain in her stomach. By the time they got her to the hospital, her lips, which had touched the can, had swollen to black.

Nancy was sweating in her down jacket in the supermarket. She rubbed her pregnant belly in circular motions.

"I knew Barbara was depressed," she said. "But I didn't see anything like this coming. I don't think there was any warning at all."

"I didn't talk to her that much," I said. "Not since she moved back to town."

"It's the winter," Nancy said. "I know it's this winter. Fifty-seven inches of snow fell last month alone. And the winds have been coming off the lake at such high speeds that everyone's having trouble just standing up."

Nancy and I tried to hug goodbye, but her eight-month pregnancy wouldn't let us get very close. She went to stand in the ten-item-or-less line with the bag of birdseed and gallon of milk and I pushed my grocery cart to the household supply aisle. I picked up a can of Dranō and held it in my hand. The red cap is fastened so tightly a knife is needed to break the seal. On one side of the can a skull is sketched next to a warning of poison:

> *"This can contains sodium hydroxide (caustic lye) corrosive, can cause severe eye damage. May cause blindness. Always keep out of reach of children. Store on high shelf or in locked cabinet. Harmful or fatal if swallowed."*

I wondered how much of the can Barbara had swallowed and I wondered if she knew how much it was going to hurt. Had there been a moment when she wanted to stop what she had done?

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My husband doesn't want to hear about Barbara Wyatt. He can't think about anything depressing.

"Please," he asked me this morning. "Don't talk about her in front of me. I don't see why you keep talking about her."

"Barbara was a friend of mine," I said. "I want to talk about her."

"All right. But not with me. Not right now. I can't listen to other people's problems," he said. He brought a roll of paper towels to the kitchen table and folded two separate sheets in half and then again so the coffee mugs wouldn't mark the wood table. He spent yesterday afternoon scrubbing the table with toothpaste trying to get the ring marks out of the wood. I can still smell the mint in the wood.

"I don't have time to get involved with everyone else's problems," he said.

"I'm not asking you to get involved with anything. I just want you to listen to me."

"Let's talk about normal things. Nothing depressing," he said. He drank his coffee in long swallows.

"It shouldn't affect you."

"I don't want to talk about someone's suicide."

"But you don't talk to me about anything," I said. "Everything depresses you."

"A lot of bad things have happened this year," he said. He spooned some jelly on his toast and spread it out evenly with his knife.

"What? What bad things have happened to you?" I asked. I got up from the table and dumped the rest of my coffee down the sink. He refuses to keep caffeinated coffee in the house. He says it aggravates him, but I can't get used to the taste of coffee with nothing in it.

"I'm not going to fight with you," he said.

"Nothing in your life has changed." I repeated the same thing I've said to him since Christmas. "Your life is exactly the same as it is every winter."

"Don't be ignorant." He got up from the table and left the kitchen, leaving the toast on the plate.

"What's so different about your life right now?" I called.

"I won't fight with you," he shouted. I could hear him walking around the living room.

"We're not fighting. I just want you to talk with me."

He didn't answer but I continued. "You're making everything up in your mind. You're the one that's making yourself depressed. Nothing's happened. Nothing's changed."

When we fight he shuts up. He won't argue with me. He says it's just a waste of time because I refuse to look at things the same way he does. In the mornings, he makes a list of what has to be done around the house. He spends every weekend scrubbing with bleach and ammonia. During the week, he works on projects he finds for himself, like mending holes in the summer screens or rearranging the boxes of junk in the spare bedroom.

Even though he won't answer me, I know I'm right. Nothing has changed. The mines closed the same time they do every year, the week before Thanksgiving. There's a lot of talk about the mines not re-opening, but that goes on every year. I don't think it's any worse than it was last year. Someone said something to my husband and he's convinced that the mines are closed forever. He's acting like he doesn't have a job. During Christmas vacation, he decided not to leave the house. He says when he goes out he runs into people, like the bartender in the Third Base Bar, who ask him what he thinks about the mines. Last time he went out, the guy at the liquor store bet him fifty dollars that the mines would stay shut once the snow melts. My husband says it's too hopeless to talk about.

The woman at the check-out counter asks me if I was a friend of Barbara's.

"In grade school," I tell her. "We were real good friends in grade school."

"I thought I remembered you two coming in here." The woman sits back on a stool she has behind the counter and shakes her head. Her sweater is buttoned up around the neck and she wears brown driving gloves to punch the cash register keys. The front door of the store automatically opens and closes, letting the wind in. I button my coat.

"That was a lot of years ago," she says without looking at my groceries. "Didn't she leave town for awhile? I remember something about her getting a job somewhere else."

"She just moved back here." I pick up a newspaper for my husband. It is the newspaper from downstate which never writes about what's going on with the mines in the Upper Peninsula. It's the only newspaper he'll read.

"I feel so sorry for her family," the woman says. "What they must be thinking right now. It really makes you wonder."

I don't remember the woman changing over the years. Going into the store every day for twenty years, she has always looked the same to me. Her gray hair frames her face and her glasses hang around her neck on a long black cord.

"It's just her father," I tell her. I open a brown bag and hold the box of spaghetti noodles so the woman can see the price. She rings it on the machine and pushes the other groceries slowly down the rubber mat.

Barbara lived across the street from me when we were in grade school. We were exactly the same age. She didn't have a mother, and her father let me sleep over every weekend night. My mother thought two nights in a row was too much, but she let me do it, because she felt sorry for Barbara, being without a mother. Barbara and I would listen to her father's Harry Nilson albums and drink Coca-Cola out of wine glasses filled with ice cubes. She knew the words to the songs on all his records by heart and I would read them off the back of the album cover to sing along with her. Barbara loved to bake things. Anything with sugar in it. One time we stayed up all night, waiting for a cake to cool so we could frost it with caramel frosting that Barbara had made by melting a bag of old Halloween caramels. I remember the only time she talked about not having a mother.

"My father would love to find a new mother for me," she said. "I don't want one."

"Maybe he's looking for a mother for himself," I said. I had overheard my mother telling someone that Barbara's father was out to get a new wife.

"No," she said. "He doesn't care about things like that. He worries about me. He can take care of me, but he won't. He thinks I should be a part of a family."

"But don't you want to have a mother?"

"Not really. I don't need one," Barbara said. "I'd like to have a mother for only one reason. If I had a mother, then she could braid my hair. I'd grow my hair as long as yours is."

My hair in grade school was long and straight. It was thin and wouldn't hold a curl even if I slept in curlers all night. I usually wore it braided on the sides and tied the ends with kitchen rubber bands that snagged and knotted when I pulled them out to wash my hair.

"It's not so great having long hair," I told her. "You have to spend a lot of time washing it. My mom makes me come straight home from school to wash it at four o'clock so it will be dry by the time I go to bed."

"But my father won't even let me have long hair. He says it's too much trouble and he doesn't know how to take care of it."

"I braid my own hair now," I said. "My mother just yells about my hair. She says she finds it all over the house."

"At least you know how to braid it. I don't even know how to do that. I never learned."

"I can teach you. You just have to practice getting the rubber bands in without knotting your hair."

We pulled strands of yarn out of an afghan Barbara was making for a Christmas gift. I showed her how to braid the thick pieces into one strand. I showed her how to turn the right piece over the left and then intertwine the middle section. She practiced on the yarn and then I untied my own hair and she braided a straight plait down my back. I had to put the rubber bands on the ends.

I walk home down the center of the street, hugging the bag of groceries in both arms. The muscles above my elbows ache and I shift the weight of the bag down my arms, but it doesn't relieve the pressure. The streets are empty. I keep my head tucked into the collar of my jacket, listening for the sound of a car. When I get home, my husband is sitting on the couch, not doing anything.

"Cold out?" he asks.

"It's freezing."

"You shouldn't go out so much. We have enough to eat here. You're going to get sick if you keep going out in this weather."

"I thought you were going to get someone to help you jump-start the car?" I ask him. I rest the bag of groceries on the coffee table, while I take off my boots. The snow melts quickly, wetting the carpet. "I'd like to have at least one car running by the weekend."

"Why do you need a car this week?"

"It'd be nice to have one to run some errands. I don't like to go out at night without a car." His car is sitting in the driveway, out of gas. He says he doesn't need one, but last week my car died just as I was turning the corner of our block. Two kids from the junior high helped me push it in front of the house and it's been there ever since.

He won't talk about it. "Anything new happening out there?"

"Not much." I give him the newspaper. He tucks a corner of it under his leg without looking at it, which bothers me. I wanted him to read it. I take my boots into the bedroom where I have compositions to correct. The principal at the school doesn't like us to use the public library because there might be students around. During the spring break, when the high school is closed, I have set up a desk area in the bedroom. It's really a card table with a dining room chair pulled up to it and one of the lamps brought in from the living room. I work for a half an hour before my husband comes in and sits on the edge of the bed. He watches me correct the papers.

"Do you want me to help?"

"No. That's okay."

"I did compositions in high school. I know what teachers look for in them. Read them out loud. I'll tell you what grade I would give them."

The high school counselor talked to a group of miner's wives in January. She told us how important it is to have patience. She said the worst thing you can do is to argue all the time.

"You'll get bored," I tell him. "It's not a very interesting topic."

"Do you have any football players in this class?" he asks.

"Two."

"Read those first."

"That's not fair, if you know they're guys," I say. But I always look at the name at the top of the composition before I read or grade the paper. "Besides, you don't want to hear compositions. They're just as boring as they were when you were in high school. Why don't you go down to Vinnie's? I saw some of the guys down there."

"I know what they're talking about," he says. "It'll be boring to be with them."

"I think they're watching the hockey game."

"But they're just talking about the same things. I can hear their conversation from here."

"You don't know that." I stop pretending to read the paper in front of me.

"Can't you hear it? The whole town's buzzing. Dranō and closing. Don't you listen when you go out? Can't you hear what everyone's saying?"

"It's not true. The town is not that small."

"Bullshit."

Without noticing, I have been writing on my hand with the red marker—tiny lines across my knuckles when I thought the cap was on.

"You know what I was thinking this morning?" my husband asks me. "I was wondering if all the color around the mines would fade."

"Color?" I am thinking about my hands and the pen marks. My husband is looking at my fingers too. But I know what he is talking about. The iron ore produces red particles which float in the air around the mines. The particles land on flat surfaces and dye them light pink. All the houses in the area are light pink, even the whitewalls of the car tires. My husband tells me the old guys who work at the security gate have pink teeth.

"No one said the mines are closing," I tell him. "You're just making that up. You're driving yourself crazy."

"Do you think I should call Lansing?" My husband stretches out on the bed. He pushes the pillow on the floor with his feet and stares up at the ceiling. He doesn't need sleep. He slept the whole month of January. He reminded me of a black bear. But not now. He has lost so much weight that his face has physically changed. His skin is tight across his cheek bones. He told me how much he weighs and it is just three pounds more than I weigh.

"Why would you call Lansing?"

"I want to talk to the governor about the mines. I have a right to know if I still have a job."

"No one's going to tell you anything you don't already know," I say.

"The mines are supposed to open on April first. If they're not going to open, I have a right to know that now so I can start doing something about it." He talks to me with his eyes closed, his body flat on the bed.

"Last year you didn't start until April 14th and you were just as nervous about starting."

"There was a snowstorm. We couldn't work till then."

"You worry like this every year. The mines always open, even after a winter of everyone believing that they won't."

"Not this year. This year it's just not going to happen."

His breathing has changed and I can tell he's sleeping. I stare at the papers in front of me, but the words disappear as I focus on the green petal of the flower in the bedspread. Someone told me that the ambulance driver thought Barbara had cut herself on glass, there had been so much blood. But the blood didn't have anything to do with the Dranō. It was from her earlobe. She had pulled a tiny gold earring straight through her skin. They think it got caught in her sweater when she ripped it off her body.

I leave the compositions spread on the card table. I will do them later when he is not in the room. It makes me feel guilty to have things to do when he is around. I take my coffee mug from the drainboard and bring it to the basement step with the new jug of wine. I keep a gallon of rosé on the last step. My husband thinks it is the same bottle sitting there since Christmas but I have replaced it twice. I drink a glass of wine at dinner in front of him, but I want to have more. I think I could drink a whole bottle of wine and not feel anything. I sit on the bottom step, listening to the sounds of my house. Through my sweater I can feel the cold steel rim where the next step hits my back.

My husband and I argued the night before about money. He is getting nervous about spending money on food. He wants to start freezing meat so we will have something to eat in the summer months. He said it upsets him to see me spending so much money on groceries.

"We should start living on your salary," he told me last night.

"What about your unemployment check?" I asked him. "You're still collecting unemployment. You're getting your money every two weeks."

"I'm not going to cash those anymore. I'm going to open up another savings account."

"Why? We have enough money."

"Now. But we don't know about the future."

"You don't know that the mines are going to stay closed," I said. "You're just getting paranoid. Don't they always threaten to close?"

"To strike. Not to close. This is the first year they've really threatened to close for good," he said. "I just want to prepare for it."

"I remember last year. You were worried then that they were going to shut down. I remember because you started reading the classifieds in the Detroit newspaper. You told me you were thinking about moving downstate last year."

"This year I can feel it. Everyone's out of work this year. If I lose my job we are going to move. I won't find anything here in town."

"How come you're the only guy in town who's dead sure they're closing?" I asked.

■

"I wish you could see things the same way I do," he said. And then he shut up. He refused to say anything else.

I fill the coffee mug again. The wine is bitter at first taste, but smooth as I drink more. I drink two refills and go upstairs when I hear my husband moving around. I have a head rush from drinking so fast. The sun's late shadows fall across the kitchen table to my ski jacket hanging on the back of the chair. My husband is in the bathroom. I can hear the pipes in the walls moan as he turns the faucets on and off. He has started taking long showers, sometimes up to an hour. Afterwards his fingertips are wrinkled and swollen to a soft pink. He says they hurt because they are so tender. I don't want to be in the house anymore. I am tired of the day, the same as it was yesterday.

Nancy is surprised when she opens the door. "I'm so glad you stopped by."

"I was just up at the drugstore and thought you might want a little company," I say.

"You're getting stir crazy, too?" she guesses. She smiles and tugs at the end of her shirt which rides up over her belly. "If I watch any more afternoon television, I'll kill myself." Her voice trails off.

"I didn't mean that," Nancy says. "Please. I'm sorry. That's not what I meant."

I turn to the door, but she has already seen that I am crying. I cover my face with my hands to hide the tears. I can't keep quiet.

"Please don't," she says. "It was stupid of me. I wasn't thinking."

I shake my head and try to swallow so I can speak, but there is too much in the way. I want to leave without saying anything else. Nancy takes my hands away from my face and holds them in her own.

She stands in front of me, rubbing my fingers which are so numb I can barely feel her warmth. I catch my breath. "I'm sorry."

"I said it without thinking," Nancy says. "Please forget it." Her arms are swollen. The elastic armbands of her shirt are too tight and there are red lines in the skin above her wrists.

We go into the kitchen and Nancy pours out two cups of tea. She sits down and lights a cigarette. "I know I'm too far along to be smoking," she says. "I found a pack under the cushions in the couch. I just smoked a couple this afternoon."

I sip the hot drink slowly and swallow the last of the tears in my throat. The overhead light fills the room with false brightness. I know I am overreacting because of the wine, but I feel calmer listening to Nancy.

"My mother always told me not to get pregnant in the winter. She said nothing could drive you crazier."

"Is Bob away?" My voice is thick. I cough trying to clear it.

"Till Thursday."

Nancy's husband drives a truck for a beer distributor. He drives down to Chicago for the pick-up and then into Milwaukee for the first delivery. He goes west for stops near Green Bay and then north into the Upper Peninsula. It takes him three days to make the deliveries.

"Does it bother you when he's away so much?" I ask. My throat is raspy and my head heavy from crying.

"Sometimes. I'm afraid I'll have the baby when he's on the road," Nancy says. She taps the side of her cup with manicured nails. "He's going to take some time off when I'm due, but I don't know about that. I'm worried about having him around all day waiting for the baby. He'll probably make me so nervous that I'll never have this baby."

"No. You'll be fine."

"How's your husband?" Nancy asks. "I heard the winter's not treating him so good this year."

"Who told you that?" I ask. My heart quickens. "Where did you hear that?"

"You know how it is." Nancy looks away from me. "He really won't leave the house?"

I stare down at my half-filled cup. I didn't know anyone knew about my husband. It makes him sound weak, as if he doesn't have the same strength the others have. I feel guilty that I can't confide in Nancy, but I don't want to talk about him.

"It's a bad winter all around," Nancy says. Her voice is smooth. She sounds neither surprised nor upset, but accepting. "Barbara's death really scared me. She was always such a quiet person. Remember how quiet she was?"

"Not really," I say. "She talked all the time."

"Maybe she was just shy."

I don't know if I am talking the truth, but I continue to argue with Nancy. "I don't know why you said that. Barbara was normal. She was just like everyone else."

"I didn't say she was different," Nancy says. Her skin is transparent under her eyes. I can see dark veins right underneath the skin. She looks tired.

"Everyone wants to make Barbara out to be weird. She wasn't. She was just like everyone else." I feel strong with my words and my voice gets louder. "The only difference between Barbara and everyone else is that Barbara never had a mother."

"What?"

"Barbara just didn't have a mother."

Nancy watches me drink the last of my tea. When I finish I get up and put my coat back on. I lean over and kiss Nancy on her cheek, where the skin is swollen. "I'll stop by again and see how you're doing next week. I promise. Have you thought about what you're going to name the baby?"

"I have some names in mind, but nothing for sure." Nancy doesn't get up from the chair.

Already at eight o'clock the streets are quiet. The inside lights of the houses are enclosed by the frost in the windows. Hidden, everyone is protected from the night. As I turn the corner on Third Street, the wind pushes me forward and I stop to keep my balance. Ahead, Lake Superior is a black hole in all the darkness surrounding me. I see the untwining of a braid of hair, the loosening of the right piece from the left and the middle strand unwinding open, letting it hang free. □

■

WHEEL-OF-FORTUNE

Barbara Grizzuti Harrison

The crocheted bedspread I bought in Martha's Vineyard lies in a heap on the floor at the bottom of my bed. My mink coat lies on top of the bedspread. I am too lazy (lazy is a word from my childhood, a word used by all the women in my family to mean bad) to pick it up. It was never a serious mink. I bought it two years ago when my father died and I was so cold: "I want to walk out of here in fifteen minutes with a mink on my back," I told the salesman at Alexanders, and I did. And now, because of my carelessness (which is after all bad), it is beginning to look like something disreputable from a thriftshop. Serious is not a word I use in regard to clothing, but I read this sentence in one of the picture magazines I pore over nowadays: A blonde actress was photographed in mink standing next to her swimming pool in Capri, and, "It's not a serious mink," she said. It was, however, a serious swimming pool, surrounded by cobalt-blue tiles and earthen pots of white and purple flowers. The ocean was in the photograph too; it looked more placid than the swimming pool, which seemed impertinent of it. And because I envied the actress her swimming pool and her view, I took the sentence to heart: "It's not a *serious* mink."

It has been a long time since I have inhabited a space I love. I look at the pictures in *Architectural Digest*, in *House and Garden* and *Town and Country*; I gorge. I dream of the sane, sweet, ordered life I could lead in a house that had French doors opening onto an expanse of lawn bordered by carefully cultivated shrubs or in a white house on a cliff overlooking the sea screened by a profusion of untameable flowering vines. I want to live in an English cottage or in a blue villa on a coral reef. I want to live in Positano or on Hampstead Heath or in Southampton. I want to live on a volcanic lake in a land of perpetual spring or in a loft in No-Ho with skylights and walls of windows and a swimming pool in my living room. I want to live where I can feel the stormy Atlantic weather on my skin. I want to live in Manderley—in that room that belonged to Rebecca, silk curtains stirred by ocean breezes. I watch *Dodsworth* on a VCR cassette for the pleasure of pretending that I may some day live in the house Mary Astor lived in high above the bay of Naples, a courtyard, a lilypond. A terrace, a verandah, a garden: Air. I want to live in a house with a central hallway and a mahogany staircase, a house perfumed by lemon oil and cut roses. Moorish tiles, fountains, coffered ceilings. High bookcases of polished dark wood. I dream of cool, dim interiors and of brazen sunlight on garden chairs. Sometimes I dream of a tall hedge that turns into a labyrinth at the center of which there is a house with stained-glass windows and ivy-covered turrets and intimate balconies full of small pink flowers. I want to live there.

The crocheted bedspread lying in a heap at the bottom of my bed is in fact a table cloth. The pattern is called wheel-of-life or wheel-of-fortune, I don't remember which. It is sixty years old, and is in perfect condition—or was, until I began, almost immediately, to neglect it. I was staying in Gay Head with my friend Nora when I bought the crocheted bedspread at a charity auction in Vineyard Haven. It wasn't cheap. Nora's house, rented for the winter, had an oblique view of the ocean, but it was a mean house, cramped and shoddy. On the fake wood paneling of the living room Nora had pinned postcard-reproductions of Moghul miniatures, and on the bannister of the staircase that led to the utility basement she had draped her one valuable possession, a paisley shawl, intricate, muted, beautiful. Nora tacked posters on the bathroom and bedroom walls. Nora has, since I've known her, always—in Dublin, in London, in New York—lived like this: postcards, shawls, posters, secondhand furniture painted in gay colors. Nora is thirty-five. It was in direct response to her gallantry in the face of willed and perennial poverty that I bought myself an extravagant present. I told Nora that I was buying the table cloth to make up for all the crocheted doilies and bedspreads my mother had made when she was married and then thrown away when she and my father were divorced. This was true; but when Nora expressed sympathetic understanding, I felt a surge of resentment for her, her poverty being after all willed.

All my friends tell me I'm lucky to have my apartment, the real estate market being what it is. It has six or seven rooms, depending on how you count, and seventeen windows and parquet floors and stained-glass windows in each of the two bathrooms. The stained glass is ugly. I derive no pleasure from any of the views the windows afford. If I lived one floor above, I would have a view of the river, which fact maddens me. "One doesn't choose one's lovers, one accepts them," a friend of mine says; and, having applied this formula to several of my least successful love affairs, I have tried to apply it to my apartment. It doesn't work. The rooms in which I live do not reward care. It is a matter of amazement to me that the plants don't die. The soap is always dirty in the soap dish. Even the teams of out-of-work actors I occasionally hire to clean this place can't seem to control the flaking and the grime. I have always liked to assume the position of a starfish when I sleep, but ever since I moved to this apartment (so much do I dislike my bedroom, Laura Ashley sheets and curtains notwithstanding), I have slept on one side and occupied, when alone, roughly one-eighth of my double bed; I can feel the springs under the part of the mattress I sleep on. It may of course be true that if I were not having an unconvincing affair with a married man, this situation would be remedied. "It's either vacuum or move," I said to my daughter (who lives, now, in two wide white rooms on the Lower East Side, rooms that she loves); "so I'm moving." But I don't move. Margaret, my daughter, for whose bedroom in my apartment Laura Ashley did wonders, thinks I am perverse. I am not perverse but if I were I would be less so if I had an apartment I loved. Looking at the ocean is, for example, a full-time occupation, one that inspires no guilt.

I wish that I were the caretaker of Monet's cottage, tea under wisteria vines.

The first house I loved was the house I was born in. There was an alcove under the stairwell where the telephone table stood. I sat there for hours, pretending the Shadow was coming down the stairs and that only I could hear him, dialing telephone numbers at random, pretending I was calling the police or Clark Gable or my father, believing that any moment Franklandeleanor Roosevelt would call me to enlist me as a spy. The house was entered from a side door that was never locked. You could decide to make a sharp left turn and walk down four shallow stone steps to the basement or you could climb a flight of wooden stairs and then turn right into the dining room, the living room, and the front sun parlor (which Grandpa built when I was born), or left into the kitchen and the back sun parlor (which was enormous, and which Grandpa, never idle, built to accommodate the radio). There was a table lamp in the basement which had etched on each panel of glass—blue, red, yellow—a little boy fishing from a rowboat; when the lamp was lit, the boy could be seen fishing in daylight, at sunrise, at sunset. I do not know what happened to that lamp. I remember sitting, one night, at the great oak table in the huge whitewashed room, in the light of that lamp, listening to a neighbor talk about her husband: "Mr. O'Brien says . . . Mr. O'Brien thinks. . . ." Nobody in our family called her husband "Mr." When we ate in the basement, which was most of the time (Grandma liked to cook on her black woodburning stove), we ate from thick white plates and drank from thick white mugs. Grandma let me dip bread in the Sunday gravy and wind up the Victrola. I played one record over and over—*Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree.* It was scratched. Sometimes I was allowed to drink wine from the white mugs. Grandma sang along with the Andrew Sisters. "Appelatree," she sang. At the far end of the basement—with its fat couches and wicker chairs—was a wooden door that led into a room perhaps ten-feet square where Grandma stored the muslin-wrapped fresh cheese she made every Tuesday, and on the slate floor were piled dozens of old books, books from my aunts' childhood. I knew and loved each page and each picture of each book before I could read. There were magazines, too, which I never touched. (The married man who visits my bed took me to New Orleans once—he is sixty, and everything is an effort for him—and he wouldn't stay in my favorite guest house. "All the antiques there are too old and abused and beautiful," he said. I thought of those magazines of my childhood and I knew exactly what he meant. We stayed at a Sheraton.) From a window set high in a stone wall of that milky, musty smelling room I could see the mulberry tree that sheltered me on hot summer days, its branches sweeping the ground, heavy with berries so delicate they seemed bruised even before they were picked, its branches forming a perfect leafy circle of protection in which I alone hid. What was I hiding from? Grownups were kind. In the linen closet on the bedroom floor my aunts kept a box of sugar cubes. They knew I'd find them. No one ever scolded me for sitting on the floor of the linen closet, eating sugar cubes. The box was never empty.

From the roof terrace that Grandpa built I could see the parachute ride at Coney Island. Sweet Williams grew in the backyard.

We moved from that house after Aunt Mary died. Her body was laid out in a coffin in the living room. I had never seen the living room furniture uncovered by dust sheets before. Before we moved Grandpa smashed the player piano with an axe. He said it was too heavy to move.

"I never liked this house anyway." That's what Margaret said—the first thing she said—when her father and I told her we were getting divorced. I papered the walls of her bedroom in the brownstone we lived in then, I papered up until the divorce and a week before Margaret and I moved; I wanted her to have happy memories of that house. She remembers climbing down the fire escape ladder to get to the backyard, she remembers playing house on the unrenovated parlor floor of that house—in particular she remembers sitting on her father's leather safari chair and dialing the unconnected phone in the parlor; she doesn't remember the wallpaper I put up in her bedroom. She remembers that a plastic bucket I'd filled with books of matches burst into flame on the move from the brownstone to the small apartment we lived in next; and of that apartment she remembers nothing. In fact I believe that for Margaret one place is very much like another. She has never talked much about her surroundings. What she loves about her place on the Lower East Side is that it is hers and she is twenty-three. There may be things she is not telling me.

I try not to think about the brownstone I lived in with Margaret and her father. When he moved out I had to bleed the furnace every night and I was afraid of rats in the cellar. It is worth a fortune, now, that brownstone.

My married lover is rich. I have never seen the apartment he lives in on Park Avenue, why should I? Once I had him drive me past the house I was born in. "How far you've come," he said. He admires everything about me. He seldom knows why I am crying. Margaret says he should buy me a loft, a villa in Positano. He owns shares in Holiday Inns. He gives me ivory letter openers, rare books, old paperweights. Sometimes I think I will go on and on amassing things—crocheted table cloths and quilts and silver boxes—and that I will never have any place to put them in, any place that I love. Perhaps Nora is right to live as she does, perhaps Margaret is right in thinking I am perverse. "Where *do* you want to live?" she asks. "In the Islamic wing of the Metropolitan Museum," I say; "for the blues, that wonderful intense blue." Margaret dismisses this. How can I defend myself against her practicality? I look at picture books instead. Sometimes I watch the television without the sound. I need to see how people live. □

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On Hunting

ERIC ZENCEY

A man walks the shoulder of state route 14, a two-lane road that winds north through the hills of Vermont from Barre ("Granite Capital of the World") toward Hardwick ("the Gateway to the Northeast Kingdom"). The man wears a red wool jacket with a black plaid design, a bright orange peakless cap, and green wool trousers. He is portly. Firmly bound to one shoulder is the leather strap of a rifle, and its barrel protrudes upward, a long thin snorkel bobbing above his head. It gives him a vaguely amphibious air. As I pass him at something near the regulation fifty miles an hour, I can see that this hike is straining him; his cheeks are red and he seems, in the short glance I have of him, to be out of breath.

There is something anomalous about a man walking along a road with a rifle. To those with urban reflexes, the sight is likely to quicken the heart and sharpen the senses, for in a world of pavement and glass a man with a gun can mean only one thing: danger. Even when there is no danger—even in open country where this sight is not unusual, even when the rifle is strapped to a red wool shoulder and pointed innocuously at the sky—there is something disconcerting about the vision. The man is a hunter. His presence here along the road means he isn't hunting: he is out of place, away from the activity that defines him.

Hunting is an uncivil activity. It occurs outside the boundaries of civic organization, in a landscape whose distance from the city cannot be measured solely by the space that lies between the hunter and the nearest high-rise apartment. The city depends on agriculture—the farmer's fields are a necessary antipode to the apartment building. In its essence, hunting is a stranger to both farm and city, a stranger to the form of order that is represented in the plow and in structural steel. While agricultural societies have domesticated the hunt, turning it variously into a formal and mannered social occasion, or a democratic, somewhat plebian escape from routine, true hunters—those whose lives depend on success in the hunt—survive today only on lands that no farming tribe has ever contested, lands in which the urban dominion that wraps the globe takes the form of a thin and tenuous jurisdiction over wilderness. For most of recorded history there has been animosity between farming peoples and hunting peoples. The farmers have tended to see the animosity as being rooted in the pure uncivilized savagery of the hunter; to the hunter, the problem was always a basic incompatibility of religious vision, manifest in the farmer's penchant for ownership.

An appreciation of the hunter's point of view in this, the conflict that led to the first and longest of all world wars, is a relatively recent development in western culture. One does not need to have read Hegel in order to see that the appreciation is neither accidental nor entirely innocent of self-interest. As agriculture has expanded its dominion, reaching the fullest development of its potential, its shortcomings, too, have become more apparent, a state of affairs that seduces us into romanticizing the simplicity and nobility of the hunter and gatherer. But romanticism is meager reparation for four thousand years of denigration; desire rarely does justice to its object. Because romanticism depends upon the form of memory (and the sense of loss) that comes from seeing time as an infinite series of unique moments, it does not escape history—and history is what is at issue here. In this conflict, history was not only written by the winners, it was *invented* by them, and its imposition on the world was a crucial component of the injustice that agriculturalists visited on hunters. Today our romanticism of the paleo-hunter only serves to affirm the completeness of the farmer's victory: the secure victor can afford to be indulgent, even generous. And yet there is a paradox here, one that Hegel might have appreciated. Geologic time (which, with its apparently infinite stretches, represents the fullest development of the historical consciousness invented by the farmer) transcends the mindset that marks off days and hours and minutes, and in so doing offers a near replication of the hunter's immersion in cyclic and sacred time. And, to one mindful of geologic time, agriculture and the urban life it supports are recent experiments in social organization, experiments that may yet demonstrate the wisdom of peoples we once viewed as savage.

No one would mistake my portly hunter for a savage. And he is, in all likelihood, only a commuter to the territory of the hunt. But he has been in the woods. Now, as he walks the road, he is out. Whenever an alien culture intrudes upon ours, there is incongruity, even when the intrusion is as mild as this, a part-time hunter walking the graveled shoulder of a stretch of two-lane blacktop, far from the centers of the urban culture that produced the road.

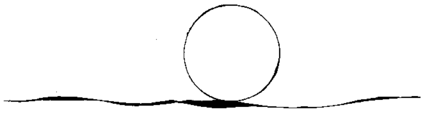
Hunters are men, mostly. (Of the 17.5 million Americans who, according to a census by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, hunted in 1980, only eight percent were women.) And while they pursue a variety of game, it is the pursuit of the whitetail deer, *odocoileus virginianus*, that defines them in the public mind. Deer are the largest animal taken in any great number in this country—they are ranked as big game, almost in spite of the fact that they are plentiful—and we as a culture are drawn to the symbolism of the large. Hunters are too; for many, hunting means deer hunting, and deer season is the event toward which the year moves.

Hunting is not a spectator sport: there are no vicarious thrills in hunting, unless they are found in the emotions the hunter feels when his quarry escapes—or is killed. No one pays money to watch another person hunt, and the few attempts at presenting hunting on television have been dismal failures, scarcely drawing audiences even on slow and rainy Sundays. This is not just because the presence of a camera and crew distorts the activity, so that the hunting that can be shown is not the hunting that is. Hunting is a private, if not solitary, act. We see hunters only when they have ceased hunting, only when they emerge from the woods. In the towns of Vermont during deer season they congregate in the parking lots of general stores, eating their lunches while the rest of the world commutes to work, drinking coffee or liquor against the chill of sitting motionless in the autumn woods. They gather to talk, to compare, to commiserate, to mock, and above all to tell stories. In the group that stands this morning outside my town's general store, there is one man in particular whose hands gesture easily, moving fluidly on forearms that are pinioned against the hood of his pickup truck, which the group uses as a coffee table. Now and again he thumps the dusty hood of the truck for emphasis, shaking the styrofoam cups, threatening the roast beef sandwich that lies close at hand atop its plastic wrap. They are a raucous and burly lot, and were it not for the fact that I recognize my friend Frank among them, and can greet him, I might feel ill at ease as I pass them on my way into the store.

It is a discomfort others share. Every autumn, during deer season, many of my friends and acquaintances become indignant. For some, the indignity has to do with loss of services: a large proportion of the native population here hunts, so much so that if it weren't for the urban refugees (the vast majority of whom are members of the professions), the economy would come to a grinding halt. As it is, commerce suffers, and everyone comes to understand that certain things are impossible during deer season: you cannot get your car repaired today, you cannot get that extra cord of wood delivered before it snows, you cannot get a plumber or an electrician or a fuel-oil delivery this week. But others have a resentment whose origin lies deeper than mere inconvenience. For two weeks the hunters own the woods and are an unavoidable presence in much of the public space of Vermont—not only in the general stores but also on the backroads, where they are found walking, and where their vehicles are parked in the high weeds or tucked into small clearings and old logging roads, a litter of metal that marks the passage of predators, like so much mechanical scat. It is not hard to see hunters as an invading force. Many people resent the feeling of insecurity this creates, and some among them would like to prevent these men with guns from killing "defenseless" animals. But in this belief they have transposed their knowledge of domesticated animals onto the wild: deer have not been selectively bred for stupidity. As wild herbivores their primary defenses are stealth and flight, strategies so successful that fewer than ten percent of the hunters here take home any meat.

In their attitudes toward hunting, anti-hunters reflect the conventions of our culture and their class. Most of them have grown up with a Walt Disney version of nature: in the moral universe of our culture's folk tales and children's stories, herbivores are always innocent, and carnivores dangerous or downright evil. It could hardly be otherwise for an agricultural tribe. Most anti-hunters come from (or aspire to mimic) the great urban middle class, and part of their disquiet comes from the sheer uncivilized earthiness of hunting. They bring with them an image of nature as a tranquil, pastoral scene—much like a city park, or the close-cropped pastures of a dairy farm—and they have been taught that it isn't quite *polite* to dwell on bodily functions. Hunting reminds them a bit too directly that humans are animals, that animals eat other animals, that gore, blood, excrement, and death are natural.

Once, at a dinner party, the vice president of a local college told me that it is immoral for a person to hunt if that person can afford to buy meat. This is a popular belief; the middle class, it seems, would forgive the poverty-stricken—for whom a hundred pounds of venison can represent a sizable addition to a food budget—but would enforce their morals on their own. No doubt the vice president thought he was being understanding of the role that hunting plays in the traditional economy of a rural area. I can afford meat; I hunt. I tried to explain myself to him.



There is, of course, an obvious hypocrisy involved in the belief that killing is immoral if you can afford to pay someone to do it for you. Most people are properly taken aback when I point this out to them. More difficult to answer are the committed vegetarians, who avoid meat for health or moral reasons. Sometimes we find common ground: I too am wary of chemical additives, I too dislike the indignities that are perpetrated on animals by factory farming. How much more noble, I suggest to them, to pursue and eventually eat an animal that has not been denied its freedom, has not been genetically manipulated or chemically bloated, but is instead wholly other, occupying an ecological niche that its ancestors, and not we humans, have defined. I try to explain how it is that I believe the world would be a better place if more people hunted—if more of our food calories came from hunting and gathering. Anthropology supports me: hunting and gathering tribes are less bloodthirsty, in regard to their own species, than agricultural tribes. Thermodynamics supports me: industrial agriculture is extremely wasteful of energy, using on the average twenty calories for every calorie of food delivered to the consumer. Natural and organic farming techniques are better—they at least have a positive caloric income—but the most efficient food delivery systems that humans have ever known have been those of hunters and gatherers. I talk about the mind-set of control that begins with agriculture—control that begins with the plow (an act of violence against the earth), continues through property relations and ownership of land (an act of violence against the integrity of ecosystems), through the genetic manipulation of domesticated creatures so that they might better suit our ends, and culminates in the most depraved treatment of humans by humans that we can imagine. Only an agricultural tribe, I have been heard to say, could invent concentration camps and practice genocide; hunters and gatherers have no notion of "varmints," no tendency to define other creatures as pests, no animus that leads them to see total annihilation of another species or race or way of life as a solution.

Sometimes this argument makes an impression. But still there is the problem of death. Many moral vegetarians have chosen their stance precisely because they want to avoid causing death; hunting too obviously contradicts the firmament upon which their very selves depend.

I have to confess to being impatient with this sort of moral vegetarianism. I think that it, like anorexia, is self-denial in the service of an acculturated pathology. But unlike anorexia, it seems to have only one cause: an all-too-human hubris that leads the vegetarian to think that antiseptic innocence is possible in this world. In turning away from the ecological niche that shaped our ancestors even as they claimed it, by renouncing the eons of evolution as carnivores that have made us what we are—conscious, self-conscious, erect hominids with binocular vision, opposable thumbs, an ability to symbolize and communicate our experience through language, and a deeply seated faith that the events of our lives have a coherence that contains meaning—the moral vegetarian is trying to elect him or herself out of context. In this, the vegetarian exemplifies the source of humanity's ecological problems no less than the engineer, whose disregard for context is founded not on an optimistic faith in the possibility of transcendence but on a faith in troubleshooting, a faith that the principles of nature can be made irrelevant through the exercise of more control and more power. But we humans are inescapably *of* nature. Tragedy and sin have origins in our existence deeper than mere ignorance, and there is arrogance in believing otherwise.

"Let me show you what I got in the mail today." I follow Frank into the living room of the old farm house he rents. "This is Blacktop. I got him last bow season." Kneeling, he strokes a cured deerskin that is flat on the floor. "I call him Blacktop because of this brownish-black tinge here," he adds, indicating the hair roots down the center of the hide, the fur that would have covered the spine. "Want to see pictures of him?" He shows me several photographs. In them, Frank is dressed in his camouflage clothes, though he has removed the camouflage paint from his face for the picture. (The camouflage is nec-

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essary to penetrate the deer's fight-and-flight range, and it is the main reason that bow hunters have their own hunting season. They do not share the woods with riflemen, who sometimes mistake even uncamouflaged humans for game.) The carcass of the deer is on the ground at his knee. In one hand he holds the bow he used to kill the animal; in the other, he holds one of the animal's antlers, showing the rack to good advantage for the photographer. He shows me the hunting journal he keeps. "August 29. Light frost this morning (55 days since the last frost of spring). From the porch I saw three deer grazing at the edge of the hayfield. One a spikehorn, another with a perfect eight point rack, the last with a fringe of black fur on top. Blacktop is 140 pounds, Perfect Eight 120, Spikehorn less than a hundred. They grazed through for twenty minutes, disappeared into Nolfi's woods." Frank watched for Blacktop throughout the fall, spotting him once a week or so until the season started in November. Frank recounts the confrontation he witnessed between Perfect Eight and Blacktop just before the rut, when the bucks become territorial. "And then," Frank says, acting out the role of his deer, "Blacktop says 'enough of this' and rears on his hind legs, still with Perfect Eight locked in his rack, and he shoves him back, just bulldozes him out of the way." For a moment I'm afraid Frank will bulldoze me out of his living room, but he stops short before me. "That's the last I saw of Perfect Eight."

The flesh side of the deerskin has slashes and scuffs at the neck. Did Frank have trouble skinning him? "No," he says. "Feel this—feel the difference between the neck and the skin down here." The skin at the neck is thicker, stiffer. "That's all scar tissue, from years of fighting. The scars go right through. You know how I got him?" Frank is ready to tell me the story. "It was sheer accident. Had nothing to do with my skill—it was just luck. Three of us went in the woods, walking into our bow stands, and we came to mine first. I had this stuff on, this imitation fox urine scent, and I was waiting there, waiting in my stand." I know that every year Frank hangs his hunting clothes outdoors in the rain and weather for the week before hunting season, and then rubs them with cut apples. He bathes with scentless soap, and for two weeks before the season he eats no meat: he is convinced that deer can identify the scent of a carnivore. "A fox runs by. That was just luck. Blacktop came along, tracking us to see where we were headed, and he passed right beneath me. I held on him, not moving, and then I let it go." The arrow passed into the rib cage just behind the shoulder, piercing the heart. "If it hadn't been for that fox, I don't think I'd've got him. He was tracking three of us, then two of us and a fox."

The hunter's accomplishments and failures, though reported in story, or demonstrated to the group in the form of the kill, are individual: the hunter is not measured against other hunters but against something more permanent and enduring. There are no famous hunters; hunting happens beyond the city's need to generate celebrity. (Hunters can and do achieve status as legends. The timescape of hunting is that of myth, rather than history.) Hunting is boring to watch because its rhythms are slow, and its attraction is exercised not in physical action (though there is enough of this, in its time, to test the body: more hunters die of heart attacks than accidental gunshots) but in the state of mind and body that it evokes. "The hunter," Ortega y Gasset wrote in his *Meditations on Hunting*, "is the alert man." In this the hunter resembles no one so much as the thinker, who must also be alive to possibilities, who must also endeavor to take nothing for granted, who also cultivates an intense and open attention because he must be prepared to catch a glimpse of the quarry in any quarter. To this I would add: if the opposite of aesthetic is anaesthetic, then I know of no more completely aesthetic activity than hunting.

My vice-presidential dinner companion told me that hunting as sport is wrong. Usually the people who tell me this perceive only three broad categories of human activity: work, rest, and play. But if hunting is a sport, then so too is the ritual of holy sacrament, for it is this ceremony that hunting most closely resembles in its essence. The ritual cleansing, the mental and physical preparation, the isolation from social bonds through solitude or imposed silence—all these are prelude to the catharsis of redemption in religion and the loss of innocence in the hunt. More than one mystic has journeyed out from the city to spend forty days in the wilderness, the better to comprehend the essential qualities of being; it is no accident that in doing so they traveled beyond the land of the shepherd and ploughman to enter the landscape of the predator and the prey. In the terrain of the hunt a human can escape the oppressive presence of the cultural self, mirrored in the human works and tracks and trails that dominate the planet, and begin to discover what lies beneath: something prehistoric, a world devoid of human signifiers that is nevertheless alive with significance.

Hunting is undeniably sport for some. This, it must be remembered, occurs in a culture that brings us celebrity tug-of-war on television. The trophy hunter whose goal it is to accumulate experiences and stuffed heads; the profligate buffalo shooters who "hunted" from trains a hundred years ago; the urban male whose annual hunting trip offers the chance to break the bonds of culture and responsibility that define him: all have been seduced into envisioning the hunt as sport, as ego gratification, as a distraction to fill an emptiness of time or existence, as mere negation of that which constrains and confines. It is an attitude shaped by the necessities that impinge upon hunting in our culture. Hunting-as-sport is testimony both to our continued need to experience the primitive human nature that predates (and still underlies) the culture of the *civitas*, and to the power of civil society to deflect the expression of that need, to channel it into forms that (at the least) do not subvert the premises of an actively disauthenticating culture and (at the most) might make that culture more bearable. A chief vehicle of that deflection is language: although hunting and farming could not be more antithetical, Fish and Wildlife Departments across the country speak of the number of animals "harvested," speak of leaving "seed populations" in place at the end of the season, speak of game as a "renewable resource." In the world as it is, hunting as an expression of a desire for an experience with the truly other cannot attain its object. The Disneyfication of our world is complete: hunters are mere consumers of experience, experiences orchestrated by a machinery that is as effectively hidden from view in the woods as the garbage trucks are hidden in the Magic Kingdom.

So hunting, a practice that once defined a way of life, remains popular today as mere sport—a category of artifice unknown to the paleo-hunter. One of the reasons sport is popular in our culture is because the goals of our tribe include the maintenance of civil relations between strangers, which is necessary if we are to have large cities and a division of labor. Something deeply rooted within us is offended by continual and abject dependence on strangers—this is why we invent governments and then by turns mock them or use them to punish others—and under the compulsion of manners our need to experience the full panoply of our capacities is frustrated. Sport provides an arena of acceptable release. Demonstrations of physical strength, endurance, and courage outside the realm of sport are likely to be pathological—one recalls G. Gordon Liddy, holding his hand in a candle flame—unless, of course, they are channeled into war. (Significantly, war is more often conceived through metaphors drawn from sport than the hunt.) In everyday life, the excellences of the body are sublimated into emotional or intellectual realms—and the damage done by this abstraction can be seen anywhere a stadium full of fanatics is electrified by violence or its potential. The vicarious nature of such experience prevents the fan from achieving much of anything in the way of knowledge of self and the self's capacity for bloodlust. Hunting, even hunting-as-sport, has the virtue of offering immediate experience, in the face of which only the most obdurate of souls can maintain an immunity to introspection.

Even so, hunters are not renowned for their sensitivity. In our culture's stereotype, the hunter is a man who is prone to violence and misogyny, whose annual hunting trip is a chance to drink to excess, and whose boisterous disregard for others hides deep insecurity. But this stereotype has little to do with hunting as it is, and only marginally relates to hunting as it is in our society. Contrary to the agriculturalist's myth, hunting does not make the hunter bloodthirsty, does not inure the hunter to the difficulty of causing death. This, admittedly, is counter-intuitive—if not mysterious.

We are so ill-prepared to face mystery, and hunting presents the hunter with so many of them; is it any wonder that hunters trivialize their activity through drink and laughter? Ancient mapmakers sketched fanciful drawings of sea monsters and wild beasts in the margins and remote whitenesses of the world; paleo-hunters found their solace in ritual and in their habitation of sacred space. But the expectation in our culture has been that science will prevail, that what is and can be known is certain and measurable. We have as a consequence come to believe that in matters cognitive as well as cartographic there is little more than amusement to be gained in exercising one's urge to tell by transmuting the ineffable into faith or art. About that which we cannot speak, we must, science tells us, remain silent; and so far from being a cause to reflect on the limitations of language, or an invitation to the exercise of imagination, the great blank stretches in our knowledge and the silence that befalls us when we find ourselves there are, at worst, thought to be "real"—a true reflection of the nature of things—or at best a sign that (lame benediction if ever there was one) "further research is required."

But the hunter has the opportunity to know better; the hunter will know that there is a pure incipience in every movement, every stillness, every twig that crackles in the woods, for each of these foretells the moment of the archetypal event, when the hunter confronts the hunted and each becomes, in the instant, a part of the other, in a psychic transcendence of boundaries that is ritually mimicked in the act of eating that comes later, when flesh becomes flesh, when energy is transformed through death into life, when two become one. The hunters I know, without exception, eat what they kill, and pause before a meal made from what they have killed, in order to pay homage in one way or another to the animal that feeds them; they would no more think of foregoing this duty than they would think to treat a fast-food burger and soft drink as if they were the body and blood of Christ. Science sees any meal as a pure caloric exchange—wine and bread into flesh, energy into energy—and we are weighted down by that knowledge. The best that most of us achieve is to understand mystery as metaphor. The hunter, I believe, has the opportunity to see farther.

And yet the hunter is as much a product of our culture as anyone else, and as much its captive. Even if we as individuals have our doubts about the ability of our culture to disenchant completely the cognitive terrain that shapes the psyche, we can express our doubts most easily only as doubts, for we are that much the creatures of our creation. The positive assertion, the language of faith in the elusive, comes to modern tongues only with great difficulty. Ours is a language better suited to bullying things into understanding or compliance than to calling apparitions into being, and our mimetic arts have long since forsworn participatory ritual for spectacle, drama, and story.

This means that, ultimately, a non-hunter's expression of distaste for what hunters are and do may be no more than an expression of dissatisfaction with the limits of our language. Only the sturdiest or the most disturbed of psyches can long maintain a belief system whose categories, premises, and axioms are inexpressible and find no resonance in the language and experience of others. And so the tales the hunter tells—the tales that are the one universally accepted act of homage to the transcendent nature of the experience—become little more than shallow exercises in demonstrating the techniques and lore of the hunt. At their best these stories will reflect a hunter's understanding of the moral codes and perhaps even the inescapable ironies of the hunt; but still they fall short of rendering the experience truly. The audience and the tale teller know that the action of the hunt takes place within a deeper interior terrain as well, and that the hunter has a claim to territory—a home range—like no other in this indifferent cosmos. The story's inability to express this—and the knowledge that, imperfect though it is, the story is the only hope of expressing it—is the source of the hunter's near-insatiable appetite for telling and retelling the tales. In translation, in the publicly available vocabulary of our culture, the story of any hunt is ineluctably drawn toward the corrupting presence of ego, and the knowledge shared by hunters will sound like cheap and brutal machismo. Other tribes have a vocabulary, in language and ritual and belief, that lets each tale affirm the depths of meaning of the hunt. In our tribe, mystery is reduced to a mere temporary puzzlement, and the self is held accountable for what is, after all, a cultural ignorance. ☐

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Thoreau for Commuters

DAVID SHI

Henry David Thoreau has always been one of America's most renewable intellectual resources, and the current revival of interest in the Concord saunterer testifies to his persistent attraction. Robert Bly has recently written an engaging assessment of Thoreau's poetic sense, Robert Richardson, Jr., has published a superb new intellectual biography, and the Library of America has just issued a complete new edition of Thoreau's works. There is even a move afoot to produce a feature film on Thoreau. But the most intriguing evidence of renewed interest in Thoreau comes from an unlikely source. Not long ago a California company selling cassette recordings of books for commuters to listen to in their cars reported that among the most popular selections was none other than *Walden*.

This revelation provoked a festival of ironic images. Imagine, for example, Los Angeles commuters listening to Thoreau preach the virtues of life in the woods, simplicity, and self-reliance while they rush in quiet desperation through smog-shrouded streets to don their corporate straitjackets. Yet perhaps Thoreau would take solace in the fact that Americans in the 1980s still find his message compelling—even if vicariously. He once observed that "I am surprised as well as delighted when any one wishes to know what I think."

The incongruous scene of commuters listening to *Walden* reminds us that America has always been a society animated by paradoxes. We have been accurately described as being at once the most materialistic, conformist, idealistic, and individualistic of people. Few societies as luxury-loving and acquisitive as ours have spent so much time condemning themselves. As the Spanish-born Harvard philosopher George Santayana commented in 1920, the American has always been "an idealist working on matter."

And perhaps this helps explain Americans' perennial fascination with Thoreau. Indeed, that fascination is often keenest among those who at first glance would seem most indifferent to his message. As Perry Miller recognized in 1961, "the appeal of Thoreau is not mainly to beatniks who have signed off from the reign of the machine, but to hundreds most abjectly enslaved by it. Thoreau appeals to those prisoners of metropolis who from him gain at least a passing sign of blue sky. He keeps alive the flicker of an almost extinguished fire of the mind amidst piles of nonflammatory steel and concrete—and chromium."

Can the same be said in 1987? What meaning could Thoreau have for those commuters backed up on the Santa Monica Freeway? In fact, what relevance does Thoreau's celebration of the simple life have for Americans in the 1980s?

At first glance the answer to such questions seems obvious. Thoreauvian simplicity appears hopelessly irrelevant these days. The mood of the nation during the 1980s has been entrepreneurial rather than frugal. The "Small is Beautiful" bumper stickers of the 1970s have given way to proclamations that "Bigger is Better." The Reagan years have witnessed not only the resurgence of the economy and the waning of the energy and inflationary crises, but also the revival of the distinctively American faith in endless abundance as the key to personal fulfillment and national purpose. According to publisher Malcolm Forbes, "Capitalism is back in now."

Among many of the nation's trend-setting young adults, the so-called Yuppies, conspicuous consumption has supposedly displaced the conspicuous austerity of the Sixties. Where a decade ago the media's emphasis was on the popularity of food cooperatives, composting, VW Rabbits, recycling, and self-sacrifice, attention today is devoted to Cuisinarts, Perrier, croissants, Hot Tubs, and Saabs. Yet one suspects that the Yuppie phenomenon is as much a caricature of the worst excesses of young America as it is an accurate reflection of the norm.

For instance, demographers report that even though there are 77 million "baby boomers" in the population, only 2.5 million fit the profile of the Yuppie: income level over $35,000 and living in cities. Most people between the ages of 21 and 39 are in fact leading far less glittery lives. To cite but one example: a reader recently wrote a letter to the editor of *Newsweek*, objecting to being lumped together with the Yuppie way of life. "By your income definition," he noted, "I am considered a Yuppie, but I have no desire to kill myself in the quest for status and acquisition. I don't want to keep up with the Joneses. There are a lot of us who believe that 'living the good life' has little or nothing to do with material possessions."

Nor is the Yuppie life as fulfilling as its alluring image conveys. Underneath the seeming attractions of life in the fast lane is the disturbing fact that the three most frequently prescribed drugs in this country are an ulcer medication, a hypertension reliever, and a tranquilizer. Some overwrought Yuppies are already discovering that they cannot live by Brie alone, and they are flocking to therapists, counselors, or ministers. Stress management has become one

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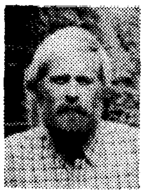
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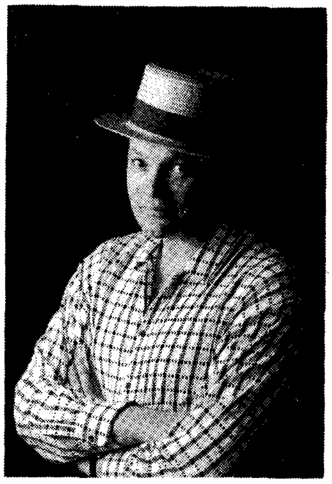
of the nation's fastest growing industries. As one psychoanalyst, who is currently writing a book on the link between careers and emotional problems, observes: "What I see both in my research and in my psychoanalytic practice are troubles based on the compromises and trade-offs that must be made in pursuit of the Yuppie-style career." A lot of these upper-middle-class professionals—journalists, doctors, scientists, bankers, stockbrokers, lawyers—"report feelings of dissatisfaction, anxiety, depression, emptiness, paranoia, as well as a whole range of physical complaints—headaches, backaches, stomach problems, insomnia, eating problems."

Perhaps this explains why at least some harried commuters are listening to *Walden* as they drive to work. For those Americans in 1987 struggling to escape the treadmill of compulsive consumerism and careerism, Thoreau does indeed offer a way out. He reminds us that as individuals we can develop an economy of necessities rather than continue to embrace an economy based on perpetual anxiety, fantasy, and self-absorbed hedonism.

Yet too many Americans continue to be confused by the practical implications of Thoreau's message and example. For all his praise of simplicity, the author of *Walden* was by no means a simple man. From the pronunciation of his name to the enunciation of his beliefs, Thoreau has left a confusing legacy. His consciously extravagant use of hyperbole and paradox encourage such confusion. Contemporary readers (and listeners) who take his exaggerations and assertions at face value understandably come away with a caricature of his evolving concept of plain living and high thinking. In the popular imagination, Thoreau thus remains the mythic hermit preaching the necessity of wilderness isolation and primitive self-sufficiency.

Indeed, there is considerable evidence in *Walden* to substantiate this image. Thoreau does sound at times like a hermit and an ascetic. Understanding Thoreau, however, requires taking his words seriously but not always literally. As he once confessed, "Some things I say, others I do." By looking at what he *did* as well as what he *said*, one discovers that his philosophy of living was in fact quite different from the stereotype. Few Americans realize that Thoreau's



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bivouac at Walden Pond lasted only 26 months, that he was just a mile or so from town, within earshot of the Concord church bells, and so close to the Lincoln highway that he could smell the pipe smoke of passing travelers. By his own account he had "more visitors while I lived in the woods than any other period of my life." His little cabin rang "with boisterous mirth" on many an occasion. Almost every Saturday his mother and sisters made a special trip out to the pond to bring him something to eat. And Thoreau kept in touch with life in Concord by reading the newspaper and by making forays into town. "Every day or two," he remarked in *Walden*, "I strolled to the village to hear some of the gossip which is incessantly going on there."

In other words, Thoreau was not an anchorite but a commuter of sorts himself, a falcon-eyed suburban sojourner, who, like so many of us, led one life and fancied at times that he led another. The more sedentary Emerson especially appreciated his muscular young friend's ability to guide him out of his comfortable Concord home and into a more bracing natural world. In June 1841 Emerson reported that his "valiant Henry Thoreau" revealed to him "the riches of his shadowy, starlit, moonlit stream, a lovely new world lying as close & yet as unknown to this vulgar trite one of streets & shops as death to life or poetry to prose. Through one field only we went to the boat & then left all time, all science, all history behind us and entered into Nature with one stroke of a paddle." Yet, a few months later, Thoreau resolved to end his dual existence and anchor himself entirely to the bedrock of life in the woods. On Christmas Day 1841 he confided in his journal that "I don't want to feel as if my life were a sojourn any longer. . . . It is time now that I begin to live." But he could not keep his resolution. By the time he wrote the opening paragraph of *Walden* in the summer of 1847, he had come to recognize that life is indeed a process of moving and changing. "At present," he noted, "I am a sojourner in civilized life again."

Thoreau thus came to view his venture in the woods not as a permanent escape but as a temporary retreat, a retreat which allowed him the luxury of frank introspection. His life in the woods provided him with a more mature understanding of the

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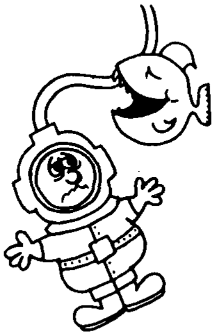

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good life and a more penetrating sense of his self and his society. In the process he recognized how artificial were the lives of many of his countrymen who, like cattle, blindly commuted from home to shop or field, caught up in the stultifying routine of everyday activity. At Walden Pond he discovered how to live more deliberately and more simply.

Thoreau also learned that true primitivism was not for him. He did not go to the Pond to "live cheaply nor to live dearly there, but to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles." His purpose was to write and to "entertain the true problems of life." If some mechanical aids or modern conveniences contributed to this goal, he saw nothing wrong with using them, as long as he did not become used by them. "Though we are not so degenerate but that we might possibly live in a cave or a wigwam or wear skins today," he wrote, "it is certainly better to accept the advantages, though so dearly bought, which the invention and industry of mankind offer." So in the spring of 1845 he borrowed Bronson Alcott's axe—which he conscientiously returned with a sharper edge—cleared his site, and then he built a cozy cabin of milled boards and brick, inserted two glass windows, shingled the roof and walls, and stocked the interior with a bed, desk, and books.

Before moving to Walden Pond, Thoreau, like so many of the Transcendentalists, had often praised the simple life close to nature without specifying its practical meaning or appreciating its practical difficulties. In his journal he used the terms "poverty," "simplicity," "savagery," and "primitive" interchangeably. During his two-year bivouac, however, he learned that many of his preconceptions about life in the woods were in fact misconceptions. He found little nobility in either the Indians or woodsmen that he encountered. During his excursion deep into the Maine woods, he discovered a pristine wilderness so awesome and powerful that its intimidating remoteness unnerved him. The scenery, he wrote, was "vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits." The visitor to such primeval woods, he added, "is more lone than you can imagine." Like Rousseau before him, he eventually concluded that the wilderness and the primitive life it afforded were periodically necessary but not permanently sufficient conditions for the good life.

This revelation in part led him to return to Concord. The wilds provided aesthetic inspiration and physical challenge, but, as he confessed, a "civilized man must at length pine there, like a cultivated plant, which clasps its fibres about a crude and undissolved mass of peat." Thoreau still found in himself "an instinct toward higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both." Satisfying both instincts, however, required that he live not in permanent isolation at Walden Pond but in what he called a "border life," commuting between primitivism and civilization. That way he could "combine the hardiness of the savages with the intellectualness of the civilized man." As he explained, "It is important, then, that we should air our lives from time to time by removals, and excursions into the fields and woods."

Thoreau thus discovered that the simple life could be led best not permanently situated in the wild or in the city, but in what he called "partially cultivated country" like Concord. Periodic excursions into the wilderness would provide necessary raw materials for the soul, and civilization would provide necessary finished products. Total immersion in either, however, was self-defeating. "There are two kinds of simplicity," he explained in his journal; "one that is akin to foolishness, the other to wisdom. The philosopher's style of living is outwardly simple, but inwardly complex. The savage's style of living is both outwardly and inwardly simple." Thoreau clearly preferred the philosopher's version. The truly "heroic spirit," he said, could never be satisfied merely with the "innocent pleasures of country life."

Thoreau's twenty-six months of camping, hiking, gardening, and thinking at Walden Pond endowed him with a more profound appreciation of himself, the simple life, and Concord. His town and family provided him with much-needed emotional warmth. "Think of the consummate folly of attempting to go away from *here*," he wrote in his journal in 1858. ". . . Here are all the friends I ever had or shall have, and as friendly as ever. A man dwells in his native valley like a corolla in its calyx, like an acorn in its cap. *Here*, of course, is all that you love, all that you expect, all that you are." Though he still needed the "tonic of wildness," he now recognized that civilization did represent, as he said, "a real advance in the condition of man. . . . though only the wise improve their advantages." As long as he could keep his wants under control and thereby keep his workday requirements to a minimum, he would be satisfied living in larger society. "I am grateful for what I am and have," he acknowledged to a friend in 1856. "My thanksgiving is perpetual. . . . O how I laugh when I think of my vague indefinite riches. No run on my bank can drain it—for my wealth is not possession but enjoyment."

Thoreau still believed that a person would be better off "raising what you eat, making what you wear, building what you inhabit, burning what you cut or dig. . . ." But he had come to see by the 1850s that most Americans no longer had the luxury of pursuing such autonomous self-sufficiency even if they were so inclined. Hence he published *Walden*

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in 1854 not in order to convince everyone to abandon their factory jobs and city homes and build isolated cabins in the forest. Too many reformers, he believed, were intent on imposing their own prescription for moral reformation on others. He explicitly denied having any single program for simple living that could be universally applied. "I would not have anyone adopt *my* mode of living on my account. . . . I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue *his own* way, and not his father's or mother's or neighbor's instead." His expressed purpose was not so much the specification of means as it was the elevation of ends. The crucial message was for each individual, at some private moment in some personal way, to engage in an act of candid self-examination.

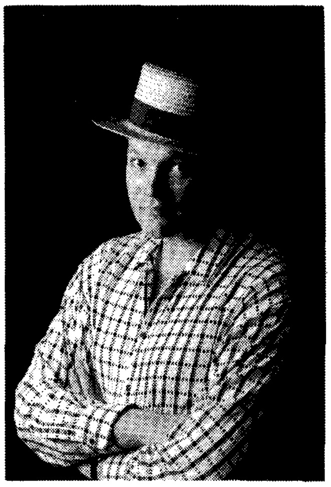
Thoreau discovered that there were many paths to the simple life, not simply the one he had chosen. When his friend Daniel Ricketson requested that he "*teach* men in detail how to live a simple life," Thoreau again emphasized that he had "no scheme about it,—no designs on men at all; and, if I had, my mode would be to tempt them with fruit, and not with the manure." In *Walden*, therefore, Thoreau was fundamentally preaching the advantages of self-culture and self-reliance, not writing a how-to-book. Simplify your life, yes, he stressed over and over again, but do it in your own way. Each person must clear a personal path to salvation. What Thoreau offered was a basic premise, not a universal checklist. As such, his philosophy of plain living and high thinking, for all its ambiguity, remains a compelling strand in our historical fabric, part of our common cultural soul.

Reflecting upon Thoreau's life and ethic reminds us that small is still beautiful; it's simply not as chic as it was in the 1970s. Though the ethic will never capture the allegiance of the majority—at least it never has—it nevertheless remains a guiding source of conduct for a significant number of Americans, as it has since colonial days. That interest in simple living has survived at all in the face of the consumer culture's hedonistic imperative testifies to the ethic's persistent attraction. It can be a good life. True, as Thoreau recognized, simplicity appears utterly absurd to "those who find their encouragement and inspiration in precisely the present condition of things, and cherish it with the fondness and enthusiasm of lovers." Many Americans claim to feel quite content with life in the fast lane, and they sneer at those who point out the dangers of such an existence.

But for those who despair because their calendars are too crowded, their lives and homes too cluttered, their work too demeaning and their commuting too draining, Thoreau's evolving ethic demonstrates how enriching it is to say no to the fads and pretense and superfluities that surround us, no to the desolate loneliness that so often accompanies comfortable urban and suburban life, and no to the asinine assumption that self-worth depends primarily upon what you wear or drive—or snort.

Thoreau discovered that there is no simple formula for leading a simpler and better life. As an ethic of self-conscious material limitation and discrimination, simplicity can be practiced in cities and suburbs, townhouses and condominiums. It requires neither a log cabin nor a hairshirt. The essence of simple living is a deliberate ordering of priorities so as to distinguish between the necessary and superfluous, useful and wasteful, beautiful and vulgar. Learning the difference between personal trappings and personal traps is the key to mastering the fine art of simple living. This means that simplicity is as much a state of mind, a quality of the soul, as it is a standard of living. There can be no genuine simplicity in the relationships of life, no genuine simplicity in the manner of living, if there is no unclouded honesty at the heart. Such transparency of purpose, such purity of intention and motive, is the very basis of any simple life which is to refresh and redeem harried lives.

The simple life is not simple to live because it requires both fortitude and imagination to sustain a regimen of enlightened material restraint in the midst of modern society. The Shakers were indeed perceptive when they sang that it is a gift to be simple. It is a gift that requires frequent cultivation and weeding. Emerson once asserted that "Life is a selection, no more." Thoreau's enduring message for the commuters of the 1980s is that we can all afford to select more wisely. As he observed in his journal in 1841, "Nothing can be more useful to a man than a determination not to be hurried." □



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Thou Shalt Kill: Murder in Fiction

BARRY SANDERS

Theme parks have taken literature for a ride. Defying laws of gravity and emotion, they race their patrons into fear, panic, and exhilaration. Computer-controlled rides provoke a year's worth of emotions in a few short minutes, as if everyone had suddenly enrolled in an Evelyn Wood Speed-Feeling Course. And then they're over. That's part of our fascination with these rides: the knowledge that, no matter how frightening, they will quickly and safely end. After all, they only simulate danger.

Readers now crave the same safe emotional fix. More and more of my students and colleagues insist: "I want to be entertained when I read; I don't need to be told that life's hard and the world filled with sadness. Tell me something new." Pop culture journals and conferences have raised virtually everything, from Conan to the Coneheads, to the same level of seriousness as Chaucer. No wonder young people confuse *Magic Mountain*, the novel, with Magic Mountain, the amusement park.

The New York *Times* Best-Seller List tallies this devaluation of literature weekly. On most Sundays, one has to work down through four or five spy novels, and a couple of romance and detective stories, before encountering a familiar name from serious fiction. Good rides, like Colossus and The Corkscrew, attract long lines by the number and intensity of their thrills, how high they climb before twisting and plummeting, careening back down to the ground. When rides lose their popularity, the front office orders them dismantled. So, too, what the *Times* calls "good reads" (imagine characterizing Van Gogh's "Starry Night" as a good see, or Beethoven's Fifth as a good listen); best-sellers are thrilling, exciting—knockouts and blockbusters. We read them, like a kid skipping stones, for amusement, or just to kill time. When sales collapse, publishers discard or shred them.

No reader could be considered serious who confined his reading to the New York *Times* Best-Seller List. Serious fiction refuses to let us off easy. It's not over when we unbuckle and step out; it continues to confront us; we can't laugh off the experience. Serious fiction lays bare our roots.

Think about those roots; they tap into murder. The first death in the Old Testament does not result from old age—Cain murders his brother. The New Testament is the recounting in four separate versions of the principal murder of the Western world. When we stop to consider these two primal murders, they should shock us with their brutality, and yet they don't, perhaps because of their monumental consequences. Though God commands Cain to wander the earth, he settles in the Land of Nod long enough to build the first Biblical city, Enoch, thus founding "civilization"; and, with his final breath, Christ forgives his double-crossers and inspires the world with Divine Love, thus binding together the New Community.

The murders of Abel and Christ dramatize something crucial: hate sometimes calls into being its opposite emotion. What an expensive lesson, if someone has to be murdered every time we learn it. Fiction offers a potent alternative. Writing scenes of deliberate murder, the author liberates feelings of forgiveness, both in himself and in the reader. And in the commanding presence of forgiveness, murder is an impossibility.

Characters can die in a lot of ways—even more ways than real people—which obscures any clear views of fictive murder. What happens, for instance, when a writer ends his story? Have the characters died, pressed like so many wildflowers between hard covers? I think not, for we can always resuscitate those flattened figures by reopening the pages. They're just holding their breath, the way kids do when they pass a cemetery, waiting for life to start again. The more vigorous characters take up shadow residence in our memory. They die when we do.

Minor characters leave unnoticed, quietly missing in action. Floating in and out like guests at one of Jay Gatsby's parties—Stonewall Johnson Abrams, Mrs. Ulysses Swett, S. B. Whitebait, Beluga the tobacco importer—their names amuse for the moment, then quickly fade. The sudden passing of solid characters affects us like real death. Abruptly, in the heart of *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf lays to rest, between brackets, her principal character, Mrs. Ramsay; those cupped hands carry the shocking news: ". . . Mrs. Ramsay having suddenly died the night before. . ." We immediately wonder, Why has Woolf let us down so hard? Or perhaps we've let *her* down, and she snatched Mrs. Ramsay away out of spite. Aren't we readers entitled to more than a mere parenthetical remark? Or has she shown us our worth—no more, finally, than an afterthought? For 200 pages Woolf made us believe in Mrs. Ramsay's immortality; her death plays such a nasty trick on us that we suspect foul play, even though no character plots to do her in, or lays a dread hand on her. Since Virginia Woolf has her character die from a stroke of the pen, she avoids outright murder and escapes with her hands clean.

Some characters keel off the page, as if by sheer accident. John Gardner has always tempted fate in his fiction, walking his characters to the very edge of expectation to see if they will slip. Sometimes, when he thinks no one is watching, he even pushes them. Take Peter Mickelsson, the hero of Gardner's *Mickelsson's Ghosts*; overwhelmed by debts, he decides to burgle the apartment of an old, fat man whose cache of money he has spied there. Surprised by the sudden appearance of Mickelsson, the old guy drops dead. It turns out his doctor had ordered him to take things easy because of a bad heart. Poor Peter: in the wrong place at the wrong time. He has not exactly killed anyone; it's more like Gardner has taken out a contract on the old guy's life. If Fate works its nasty effect, who needs a murderer?

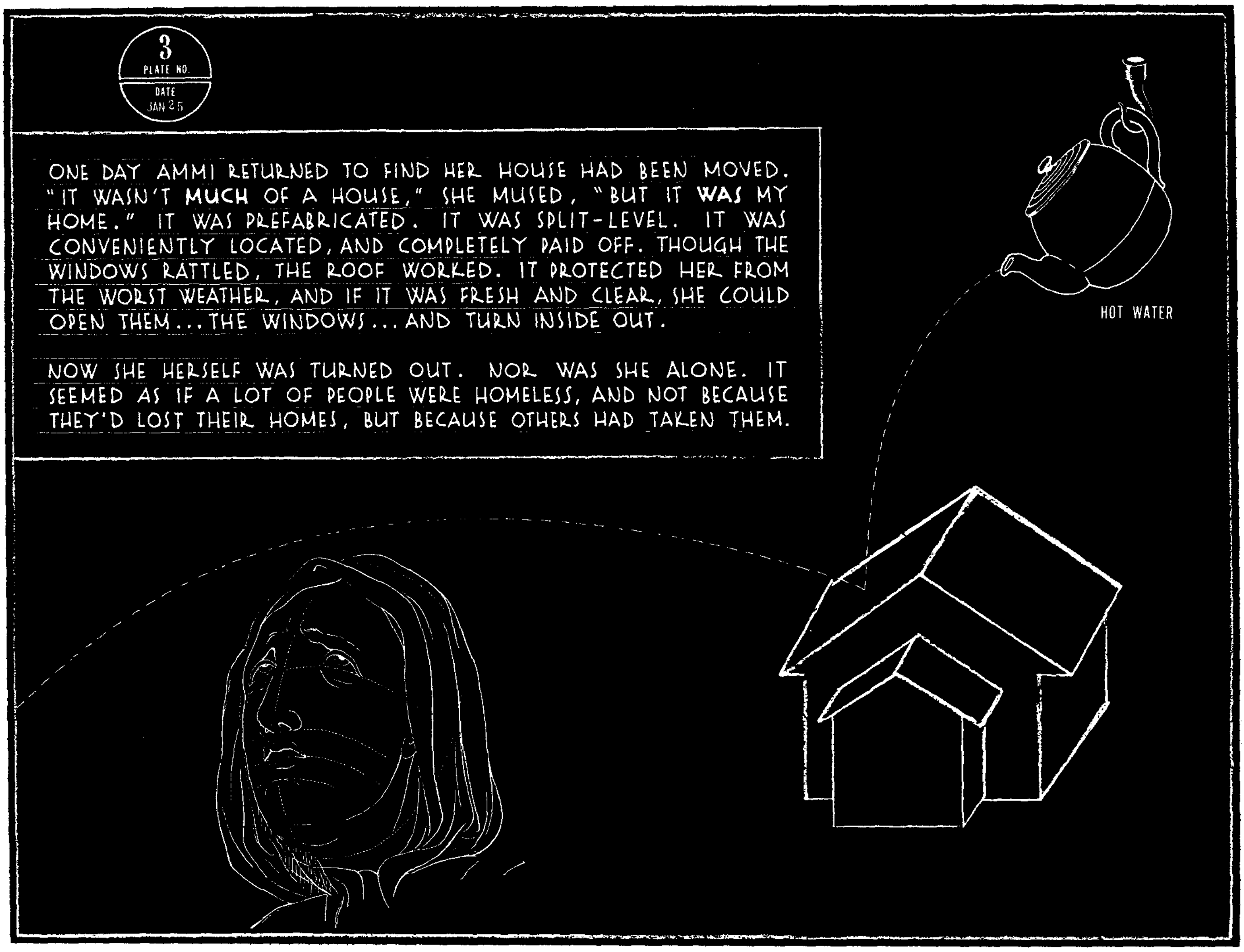
Surely, we ought to find intentional murder—by a Raskolnikov or two—lurking in that mainstay, the detective story. Detective stories are, after all, the Black Plague of fiction: that genre has wiped out more characters than all others combined. But in those stories murder merely supplies the yarn for the knotty problem that some cop, house dick, private eye, or public citizen, with his labyrinthine intellect, will ultimately untangle. We care about the murderer's motives, not his soul.

Even in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the so-called first detective story in the world, murder simply provides Poe the occasion for a silly fantasy. Monsieur Dupin, the story's hero, deduces with his masterfully ratiocinative mind that the murders of Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter are too atrocious a butchery—excessively *outré*, in Poe's word—to have been carried out by humans. We discover, through Dupin's logic, that the murderer could only have been an animal. After tantalizing us long enough, Dupin reveals the culprit: a large, East-Indian orangutan, recently escaped from his owner's apartment.

Poe domesticated murder, whipping it into a thing to observe, analyze, and play with, rather than tolerating it in its wild state. So, in a good deal of American fiction, we catch only glimpses of its ferocity: along Huck's Mississippi River; deep in James's ghostly world of "Turn of the Screw"; aboard Melville's warship, *H.M.S. Indomitable*; throughout Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County; in Hemingway's Africa, behind Margo Macomber's 6.5 Mannlicher; under Malcolm Lowry's volcano. Truman Capote and Norman Mailer even wrote themselves into a subgenre, parajournalism, to recreate in exquisite detail the random, serial murders of *In Cold Blood* and *The Executioner's Song*. (Murder lies at the heart of much contemporary black American fiction, a subject that would require at least another essay.) But in all these examples, plotting and premeditation—and, in most instances, violence—remain off the page.

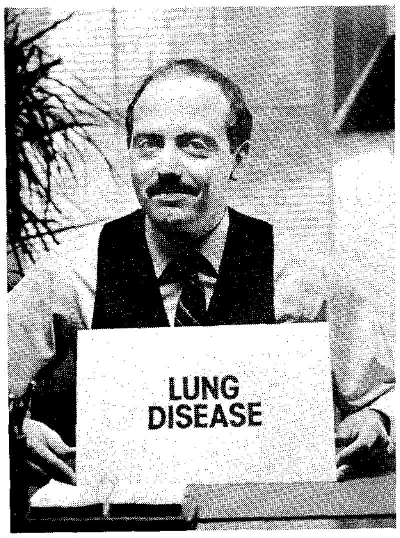
But contemporary America has produced several remarkably cold-blooded authors. John Hawkes is one. Even though he has assumed many voices, Hawkes would be immediately identified in any line-up of suspected authors. He flaunts his long record of fictional murder, which began with *The Cannibal*, a novel he wrote as a twenty-four-year-old graduate student, refusing, in the half-dozen subsequent novels, to abandon his life of crime.

William Gass is particularly adept at murder. He covers his tracks so cleverly in his remarkable story, "The Pedersen Kid," that several critics, trying to identify the story's killer, have fingered the wrong character. It's understandable: A crafty and calculating writer, Gass aims to get us. He keeps his prose indirect and spare, and so passive that we helpful readers, eager to keep the action going, take over as subject of those sentences. Egging things on,


3
PLATE NO.
DATE
JAN 25
ONE DAY AMMI RETURNED TO FIND HER HOUSE HAD BEEN MOVED. "IT WASN'T **MUCH** OF A HOUSE," SHE MUSED, "BUT IT **WAS** MY HOME." IT WAS PREFABRICATED. IT WAS SPLIT-LEVEL. IT WAS CONVENIENTLY LOCATED, AND COMPLETELY PAID OFF. THOUGH THE WINDOWS RATTLED, THE ROOF WORKED. IT PROTECTED HER FROM THE WORST WEATHER, AND IF IT WAS FRESH AND CLEAR, SHE COULD OPEN THEM...THE WINDOWS...AND TURN INSIDE OUT.
NOW SHE HERSELF WAS TURNED OUT. NOR WAS SHE ALONE. IT SEEMED AS IF A LOT OF PEOPLE WERE HOMELESS, AND NOT BECAUSE THEY'D LOST THEIR HOMES, BUT BECAUSE OTHERS HAD TAKEN THEM.
HOT WATER

M. KASPER

Some fast talk on lung disease.



Your lungs are an incredible piece of machinery. But your lungs are also incredibly delicate. Chronic bronchitis. Emphysema. Lung cancer. Asthma. Tuberculosis. All these diseases prey upon the lungs. Even the air you breathe at home or work can be the cause of lung damage. But the American Lung Association is battling *all* these lung diseases. For your lungs' sake, join the fight.

—*John Moschitta, the fast talker.*

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we emerge, before we realize it, as unwitting accomplices to murder. What can we do about this murder, pinned so unexpectedly on us? Well, we can try, like a fastidious cat stepping out of its litter box, to shake it off. But Gass blocks us. His victim is such a drunken, ornery son-of-a-bitch that we actually relish our killing. We're overjoyed to have the old trimmer gone; and that joy, a constant reminder of what has happened, makes the murderous deed palpable and permanent. We must bear the burden of our delight.

But Gass bears the same burden; after all, he plotted the murder and enticed the reader to join in. So writer and reader slosh in this awful mess together. They have only one out: to forgive themselves for their evil deeds.

No author can escape full responsibility for his story; characters leave behind the fingerprints of their author. He performs every heroic act, commits every crime, for he *is* every character. Twain is the man who corrupts Hadleyburg, as Dickens is the miserly Scrooge. Dostoyevsky can only ignite Raskolnikov's suffering by stalking right beside him, plotting the murder of the old lady pawnbroker, as they both, in dark secrecy, put an end to her life.

My God, we say, such an incredibly real story; how could Dostoyevsky have written it? He must have known a killer. But the good writer need only know himself to know a killer. The author of premeditated murder indicts himself, for his story acknowledges that, given exactly the right conditions, he could be capable of every one of his characters' deeds—even murder. So, his finished story may, for excellent reason, shock him, the way we sometimes deny our own voice, hearing it amplified the first time. He can struggle to ignore what he has done. Or he can destroy the evidence, tear up the story, but to what end? Like a powerful magnet, writing attracts the author's most terrible, deeply held secrets toward the pole of forgiveness. Finally, then, if he wants to continue writing, the author must confess: That's just who I am, a descendant of Cain.

In chapter four of Genesis, God compresses the vast story of Abel's murder into one sign, which He tattoos on Cain's body. Cain is the first instance of God's word becoming visible. With that one hieroglyph, God intends an unspoken commandment for the entire world to leave Cain unharmed, so Cain can suffer, through seven times seven generations, the horror of his own deed. According to some third and fourth century Biblical interpretations, Cain repents and to the surprise of everyone, especially Adam, God grants His forgiveness.

Surely someone must have felt the impulse, out of spite or rage or justice, to kill Cain. But who would have been foolhardy enough: the mark comes from God, and lives in Cain. The protective mark or brand, divinely sent, is an ancient motif we still find in many oral cultures; it anticipates attitudes toward the sacredness of inscription. For Jews and Moslems, the written word remains as inert as dust, but is breathed into life when recited aloud. For Christians, the word came palpably alive for all time through the incarnation of Christ; writing imitates this miracle by making the word visible. Whether the spirit is set free through recitation, or dwells indelibly in writing, the three major religions of the world treat words as living things—miraculous and holy. What has an author created when he brings together thousands of those letters as a story in which characters—it is no coincidence that the same word means letters—take on yet another life? The ultimate power of fiction is staggering. Even the stuff we write on is mysterious and sacred. The Chiriguara Indians, as if in response to Cain, call paper "the skin of God."

Perhaps the marks we make on paper *can* protect the world from its destruction. Better than anyone else, authors understand the mysterious life of those letters; that is why few of them dare commit fictive murder. How blasphemous would it be? What awesome power would it unleash? Enough power, I say, to vanquish outright murder, or forms of it—in a nation's domestic or foreign policy, in stockpiles of missiles and armament, and in the clenched-fist diplomacy that threatens to rocket us into oblivion. I hang my hope for mankind on words, on speaking and writing, and in particular on fiction that *defuses* our murderous impulses by illuminating our darkest secrets. We already know what mushroom clouds illuminate. Nothing. ☐

Drue Heinz Literature Prize

RULES FOR ENTRY

The University of Pittsburgh Press announces the eighth Drue Heinz Literature Prize for a collection of short fiction to be published by the Press. The winner will be announced during March 1988 and will receive a cash award of $7,500 and publication by the University of Pittsburgh Press in 1988 under its standard royalty contract.

Eligibility

1. The award is open to writers who have published a book-length collection of fiction or a minimum of three short stories or novellas in commercial magazines or literary journals of national distribution.
2. The award is open to writers in English, whether or not they are citizens of the United States.
3. Translations are not eligible, unless they are translations into English done by the author himself or herself.
4. Submissions should consist of a manuscript of short stories, one or more novellas (for the purpose of this award we define a novella as a longer piece of fiction, no more than 150 double-spaced typed pages), or a combination of one or more novellas and short stories.
5. Work previously published in book form as a collection of fiction solely by the author is not eligible.
6. Stories or novellas previously published in book form as part of anthology of fiction are eligible.

Format for Submissions

1. Manuscripts must be typed double-spaced on good-quality white paper, and pages must be numbered consecutively.
2. Manuscripts should be no fewer than 150 and no more than 300 typescript pages.
3. Each manuscript should be accompanied by a list of the writer's published work.
4. Xerox copies are acceptable if readily legible and printed on good-quality white (not gray) paper.
5. Each manuscript should have a cover page listing the title of the collection and the author's name, address, and telephone number; *the author's name must not appear elsewhere on the manuscript.*
6. Each manuscript must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope or book-mailer large enough to accommodate the manuscript; otherwise, the manuscript cannot be returned.

Multiple Submissions

1. Authors may submit manuscripts sent to the Press to other publishers while the manuscripts are with us; please notify the Press immediately if a manuscript submitted for the Prize has been accepted for publication elsewhere.
2. Authors may submit more than one manuscript to the Drue Heinz competition so long as each meets all eligibility requirements, and one manuscript, or a portion thereof, does not duplicate material submitted to us in another manuscript.

Dates for Submission

1. Manuscripts should be mailed *only during July and August,* and in any event must be postmarked not later than August 31.
2. Manuscripts received before July cannot be acknowledged; manuscripts postmarked later than August 31 will be returned unread.
3. Send manuscripts to: Drue Heinz Literature Prize, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA 15260.
4. Manuscripts will be judged anonymously. The Press and the judges will not be able to offer critiques of manuscripts or to enter into correspondence about the manuscripts other than with the winning author.

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